WAYLAND PUBLIC LIBRARY
3 4869 00063 9946

WAYLAND PUBLIC LIBRARY
5 CONCORD RD.
WAYLAND, MASS. 01778

Framingham State College

THE TOWN OF WAYLAND, MASSACHUSETTS: A MICROCOSM OF, AND UNIQUE CONTRIBUTOR TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY MOVEMENT IN MASSACHUSETTS

027.474
Sch
(circulating)
Copy I

For
An Independent Study in History
With
Professor C. Haglund
November 20, 1975

By
Sandy Schwalm

The Town of Wayland, Massachusetts: A Microcosm of, and Unique Contributor to the Development of the Free Public Library Movement in Massachusetts

The free public library in the United States, in the modern sense of the term, came into being as a result of a long evolutionary process which spanned a period of approximately 200 years. Its origins can be traced back to the cultural heritage brought by the New England Puritan settlers. During the evolution of the library as a social institution, one which man establishes and then shapes as a means of achieving his social goals, it moved from a private collection of books or the narrow function of the conservation of the printed word, to the broader objective of the advancement of popular and universal education. This required basic changes in the goals of society itself. The specific purposes for which libraries existed and their general objectives had to be expanded and broadened before it was possible for a tax supported, municipally owned, free public library to come into existence. As the goals of early New England society were transformed in response to changing conditions, the environment necessary for the development of the library was first provided in New England. It was here that the significant steps in the evolution of the public library movement were first taken.[1]

Historian Samuel Eliot Morison asserts that "the story of the intellectual life of New England in the 17th century... is one of the principal approaches to the social and intellectual history of the United States. Primitive New England is the porch to the temple; a Puritan Pronaos as it were, to the American mind of the 19th century, and of today."[2] He cites

---

[1] Jesse Hank Shera, Foundations of the Public Library. The Origins of the Public Library Movement in New England 1629-1855 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1949; Shoe String Press, Inc. Hamden Connecticut, 1974), p. v.

[2] Samuel Eliot Morison, The Intellectual Life of Colonial New England (New York: Cornell University Press, 1936; Seal Books, 1961), p. 274.

the development of the modern library movement in New England as both a result and reflection of this social and intellectual history. In the same way, the origins and early history of the Wayland Town Library are a microcosm of the history of the contemporary and later public library movement in America. A fairly consistent pattern of conditions and events preceded the establishment of each free public library in any New England town and later throughout the nation. With few exceptions, the history of the library movement in the Town of Wayland closely followed this pattern.

The definition of the term "public library" has varied, and different connotations have been acquired over successive periods of time. At first it simply meant the custodianship of books by public authorities. Its modern meaning is found in the U. S. Bureau of Education definition set forth in 1876, as a library "'established by state laws, is supported by local taxation or voluntary gifts, is managed as a public trust, and every citizen of the city or town which maintains it has an equal share in its privileges of reference and circulation.'"[1] While the Wayland Town Library has deservedly won recognition in the annals of American library history as the first library in the nation to fully meet this modern definition, its historical significance lies not only in its citizens unique action of taxing themselves to support their own library; but in the typicalness of this town's library history. This typicalness caused its actions to become a milestone in the public library movement.

Wayland (first known as Sudbury, and then as East Sudbury), like most Massachusetts and many other New England towns, was founded upon a Puritan cultural heritage. The Puritan religious creed was a stimulus to mental activity and promoted an interest in the classics, belles-lettres, poetry and science. The clergy, the most learned individuals in the community, were leaders of intellectual enlightenment and the transmitters

---

[1]Shera. pp. 156-157.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2018 with funding from
Boston Public Library

https://archive.org/details/townofwaylandmas00schw

of new learning to their congregations. The grammar school and the college kept alive and handed down a classical tradition. Classics flourished in New England as Puritanism flourished because of a deep concern about education for posterity's sake. Also, many of the original settlers were well educated themselves. In 17th century New England, a genuine intellectual life grew despite the conditions of settlement. "A veneration for learning, a respect for the humanities, and a habit of considering values other than material had been so firmly established among New England people by 1701, that they were as well prepared as any people in the world to be quickened by new ideas and to play their part in the coming drama of the Rights of Man."[1]

The Puritan value placed on education in the broadest sense is illustrated in Massachusetts by the almost immediate establishment of Harvard College. Its purpose, as stated in its charter, was "'the advancement and education of youth in all manner of good literature, Artes and Sciences' and 'all other necessary provisions that may conduce to the education of the English and Indian youth of this country in knowledge and godliness.'"[2] Harvard also illustrates Puritan devotion and willingness to sacrifice for the cause of education. To make this education available to all who were intellectually capable, every family in all of New England was asked to donate one-quarter bushel of wheat or its equivalent, to defray the expenses of the students who were unable to pay for themselves. New Englanders sacrificed, and their favorable response was what allowed Harvard College to survive financially.[3]

Puritans had a desire to transplant European civilization to their new country and succeeded quite well at doing this. They realized that in

---

[1]Morison. pp. 4, 17, 273-274.

[2]Ibid. pp. 31-32.

[3]Ibid. p. 38.

their struggle for survival in a wilderness anything which was not practical or absolutely essential would require special efforts if it were to be preserved. Their belief, that intellectual degeneracy would lead to spiritual decay, motivated them to make "great sacrifices to transplant the apparatus of civilized life and learning."[1]

Private libraries were brought to this country by a number of the original settlers, and then extended through the addition of other books from England, either by purchase or gifts. Contrary to popular belief, these early private libraries, while predominantly religious in nature, also included works on a relatively wide range of topics. The larger collections were more likely to have a diversity of content. One 1600's collection numbering over 400 volumes, included such titles as Bacon's Advancement of Learning, Bodin's de Republica, Machiavelli's The Prince, and Sir Walter Raleigh's Prerogatives of Parliament in England.[2] The largest private library of the 1600's probably belonged to Cotton Mather and numbered about 2,500 books. By the time of his death it contained at least 4,000 volumes on a variety of subjects including histories, geographies, modern science, classics and general literature. Earliest libraries were mostly owned by ministers, physicians and other college graduates; but small as they might be, private libraries were widespread among the entire New England population. Probate records reveal that books were left as part of the estates of fishermen, farmers, skilled craftsmen, merchants and even servants.[3]

Books in these early private libraries were used and were at least occasionally loaned out as some show unmistakable proof of having been borrowed by friends of the owner. One Massachusetts probate record

---

[1] Ibid. p. 272.

[2] Ibid. pp. 33-34.

[3] Elmer D. Johnson, A History of Libraries in the Western World (New York and London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1965), p. 273.

appraised a library in an estate "'at pounds 20' not including certain books ' lent out and not Gott in.'"[1]

Another indicator of early New Englander's interest in books and other reading material was the bookstore in Boston in 1642. By 1700 there were at least seven booksellers in Boston, and they were found in other towns as well. Towns not having a bookseller had their needs met by hawkers and peddlers who travelled through the countryside selling books, broadsheets, pamphlets, etc., many of which were printed continuously in New England from the time of the arrival of the first printing press in 1639. These peddlers were well-off financially, indicating that the inhabitants of the inland towns valued and bought books just as the city dwellers did. Boston must have been considered a good market for books, because executors of an estate containing over 1,000 volumes chose to sell them in Boston, rather than shipping them back to England for sale.[2]

In the rural town of Wayland, private ownership of books beyond the Bible and religious works, must have existed prior to the Revolutionary War. [redacted]

By bringing libraries with them and by printing and purchasing additional books, New Englanders created a literary atmosphere which strengthened their educational establishments and prevented the colonial conditions from isolating them from the intellectual influence of Europe.[3]

---

[1]Morisen. p. 141.

[2]Ibid. pp. 128, 144.

[3]Ibid. p. 151.

In 17th century New England, the term "public library" meant only that it was a collection of books owned by a public body such as the town, church, or college. As early as 1629 when the "Bonadventure" landed at Salem, it carried on board a collection of eight books donated to the charter company and an additional 86 religious volumes which had been purchased by one of the arriving ministers. This minister submitted to the Massachusetts Bay Company a bill to receive reimbursement for these books. Thus, from the very beginning New England had an example of ownership of books by the corporate governing body, for use by the inhabitants.[1]

"At Harvard in 1639 (as one of their historians put it almost a century later), 'a Foundation was laid for a Publick Library, which was a Work of Absolute Necessity; Books being so scarce in the Country that it was impossible for the students to purchase them.'"[2] John Harvard willed about 400 volumes and half of his estate to the college, which considered his gift so important that the college took his name. The library grew slowly and in 1723 contained 3,500 volumes, two-thirds of which were religious. Of the remaining 1,000 volumes, half were history and geography and the other half classics, science, and language, in that order. In 1764 after a fire, the Massachusetts Legislature voted money to replace the building and popular subscription was used to replace the books. Use of the Harvard Library was in no way available to the community at large and was limited to the clergy and scholars. Even in 1765, Harvard underclassmen could not withdraw books from the library; and all were required to use its facilities on Wednesday, the only day that it was heated and open.

In 1656 the merchant Robert Keayne, bequeathed to Boston "'three great writing bookes' together with such of his 'Divinitie Bookes and

---

[1]Shera. p. 16.

[2]Howard Russell, "The Publick Library: A Work of Absolute Necessity" Wayland Town Crier (Wayland, Massachusetts: n.d., n.p.), clipping found at Wayland Historical Society.

[3]Johnson. pp. 275-276.

commentaries as the ministers should think suitable for a public library.'"[1] His bequest was conditional and required the city to build a handsome room for this library within three years, or the books would become the property of Harvard College. Boston did build a Town House, and a room was provided where the library was housed. However, municipal interest went no further at that time. A bequest of a minister added to it another ten volumes; but it never became more then a small library of theology works and was eventually destroyed by fire. Keayne himself did not recognize a need for a public library to serve all the people. He was motivated by his personal interest in preserving his own books and writings. His will stated in three places his purpose as being "' a Library and Gallere for Devines and Schollers to meete in.'"[2] However, that officials regarded this library as common property of the Town of Boston is evidenced by the collection being placed in the Town House, by the appointment of an individual to catalogue it, and by the additional use of the room as a depository for public records. "By common agreement the possession of a library was a proper municipal right."[3]

In Massachusetts during the 17th and 18th centuries, a scattering of towns owned small collections of books, and the majority of these had been obtained through private gifts. The fact that ownership of a few volumes did not stimulate a desire on the part of a town's citizenry to expand the collection is probably attributable to the nature of these original collections and their lack of widespread popular appeal. Wayland was a typical example of a town receiving a gift of books. In 1731, it

---

[1] Morison. p. 145.

[2] Seymour C. Thompson, Evolution of the American Public Library, 1653-1876 (Washington, D.C.: Scarecrow Press, 1952), pp. 6-8.

[3] Shera. pp. 22-23.

received volumes bearing the imprint of London, 1673. Inside appeared the words:

> These practical works of the late Rev[d] and pious Mr. Richard Baxter, in 4 volumes, folio are given, in sheets, by the Hon. Samuel Holden, Esq. of London; and are bound in the charge of Mr. Samuel Sewell, of Boston, merchant, for the use of the church and Congregation in East Precinct of the Town of Sudbury under the care of the Rev. Mr. Cook, by the direction and disposal of Rev. Mr. Benj. Colman, Pastor of a church in Boston.[1]

This inscription seems to indicate that the London donor gave the volumes for use in America, but that the choice of the Town of Wayland as the actual recipient was made by a Boston minister. At this time in Wayland, congregation and town were synonomous, there being only one church. The books were placed in the meeting house for the use of the townspeople on Sunday mornings. This gift of religious works for public use followed the example set by Rev. Thomas Bray in his missionary endeavor to establish semi-public parish libraries in America, by sending collections of religious works to various ministers. Bray's movement was limited in New England as he was a member of the Church of England; but his influence was felt in the establishment in 1698 of the King's Chapel Library in Boston, with 96 books given by the Bishop of London. This library suffered the same fate as most other Bray Libraries. Lacking financial support and public interest, they passed out of existence or were absorbed by newer forms of libraries more adapted to the needs of the people. In 1823, having increased to only 214 volumes, the King's Chapel Library was turned over to the Boston Athenaeum. Bray's library in South Carolina did result in the passage of the first Library Act in the United States. It created what

---

[1]Rev. Richard Baxter, untitled collection of his works (London 1673: Bound in Boston, 1731) found in the Wayland Town Library.

was close to a modern day public library, by having municipal control and regulation of the use and circulation of books for all the residents of the town. However, the public was not ready for a public library venture in the early 1700's; and Bray's libraries faded away and had no continuity with the modern day public library. This movement did create, however, an awareness and a sense of responsibility for providing books for use by all the people. In New England after 1700, many churches formed small libraries of religious works for public use.[1]

In a few rare instances in Massachusetts, towns actually voted an appropriation to buy a specific volume or volumes prior to 1800. Provision for future growth or continued maintenance was still absent, but the concept of municipal ownership of books was expanding to include the circulation of books and town regulation of their use. These actions might be called distant forerunners of the tax supported public library. Motivated by a recognized responsibility for the religious education of the people, Dorchester at their 1665 town meeting voted to pay for catechisims to be owned by the town. In 1731 the Town of Lancaster purchased one religious volume for the use of the townspeople. It had a 96 word title, was almost 1,000 pages, and was bought, owned, and controlled by the town, under the care of the selectmen. By 1672, Concord had a collection of books. Although the records do not indicate how they were obtained, these books did circulate; and the town declared that they must not be abused or "'lent to any person more than one month at one time.'"[2]

Just as the college library was established as a matter of necessity, the social library came into being during the 1700's to meet cultural and economic needs. As the hardships of settlement disappeared,

---

[1] Johnson. pp. 278-279.; Shera. p. 28.

[2] Shera. pp. 25-30.; Thompson. p. 17.

colonial New England became a more stable and culturally mature society with a class of economically prosperous citizens -- conditions which are necessary for the growth of libraries. As settlement required a lesser expansion of energies, interest in books became greater. Private libraries became even more common, particularly for professional and government officials. One historian contends that in 1770 probably a larger percentage of educated Americans owned libraries than in 1960.[1] Settled conditions and prosperity, however, also enabled the middle classes to establish academies; and educational advantages previously limited to the wealthy were now available to the farmer and merchant. Commercial maturity was accompanied by recognition of the need for education of all the people, and an emphasis on practical and vocational knowledge increased. Greater general education, of course, expanded the reading population and gave it a new and different character. As Puritan theocracy declined, theology lost its influence upon the selection of reading material. The novel appeared as a popular literary form, and simultaneously an interest in current events expanded the demand for newspapers and periodicals. All of these were motivating factors in the formation of social libraries, as more people wanted to read material of a nature unavailable to them through the small collections of church or town. Private libraries were economically unfeasable for most people; so of necessity, people joined together to obtain satisfaction of their individual needs through voluntary association with others.[2]

Beside the need to meet the demand for books which were scarce, the social library met the need for group activity. Social libraries had public reading rooms or specific dates when members would gather at one

---

[1] Johnson, p. 287.

[2] Johnson, pp. 286-287.; Shera, pp. 41, 90-98, 121.

place for the exchange of books. Thus, they may have been fostered by and evolved from the gatherings of townspeople at the local inns for discussion and social intercourse.[1]

A native son of Boston, Ben Franklin, established the first American social library in 1731, in the city of Philadelphia. Upon his arrival there, having a need and desire for books which could not be met, he said: "'There being no manner of Provision made by the Government for public Education, either in this or the neighbouring Provinces, nor so much as a good Book-Seller's shop nearer than Boston.'"[2] While it was originated elsewhere, the social library was developed to its greatest extent in New England, where the large number of small towns and parishes of homogeneous population, united by common interests, offered the most fertile field..."[3]

Voluntary library associations in New England began with a proprietor form and were called social libraries. Later the subscription library developed, and the term social library was applied to both types. The proprietary library was based on a social compact or covenant in which joint ownership existed among all members through the purchase of common stock. Each individual made an initial contribution to a common fund which was used to purchase the books for use by all members. Expansion and maintenance of the library was supported by dues paid annually. "In two-thirds of the institutions for which data is available, shares ranged from $1.00 to $4.00 per unit; and in only a few instances was the cost in excess of $25.00."[4]

When the need for books could only be met adequately through association with others, the colonists "did not stop to speculate about the

---

[1] Shera. p. 46.
[2] Thompson. p. 34.
[3] Ibid. p. 64.
[4] Shera. p. 77.

opportunity to create a new and radically different medium for the promotion of this end. Rather they did the easy and natural thing and turned, with justifiable confidence to forms that were common in the communities about them,"[1] namely, the joint-stock principle. Social libraries were not democratic in operation, as voting rights were based upon the number of shares held. Some were simple common-law informal groups, but most became legal corporations. Incorporation was willingly and readily granted by the town or state and provided the means by which these groups could protect their investments and enforce their rules. At first incorporation was granted to specific social libraries; but in 1798, Massachusetts enacted a law which allowed all social library groups with seven or more members and property holdings of less than $500, to legally regulate their own affairs. It was entitled the law "To Enable the Proprietors of Social Libraries to Manage the Same."[2]

The content of social libraries paralleled that of the private libraries of the laymen. Although some were formed to meet the needs of special reading interests, such as law, children's literature, etc., these were the exception and not the rule. Most social libraries aimed at a general and well balanced selection of books. This began a movement away from a culture dominated by theology and toward a more progressive liberalization of book selection policy. The actual selection of books was of major importance due to the limited amount of funds available to each social library and the need for continuing voluntary support. Frequently the by-laws specifically stated what type of books should be purchased and also excluded others. Book selection was usually the function of a special committee and frequently required the vote of approval of the entire

---

[1] Ibid. p. 67.

[2] Ibid. pp. 61-63

membership. The librarian did not perform this function, as basically he served as custodian with little or no authority. His salary would be minimal, if not non-existent. Often the librarian's function was carried on by a member, or by a non-member, who thus gained the privilege of use of the library.[1]

That pragmatism demanded that books selected should meet popular demands was felt by even the most scholarly of libraries, such as the Boston Athenaeum. A letter written in 1807 by an individual appointed as its purchasing agent, said:

> We must, at least for some time, think of popularity; and I know of no method so likely to procure it as to keep our rooms furnished with an abundance of magazines and pamphlets; and new books. This, I am satisified should be our primary object; and our second, to lay slowly and secretly the foundations of a permanent library of works difficult to be procured in America.[2]

As early as 1793, a catalogue was published to serve as a guide and which formulated a general policy for those making book selections for social libraries. In the preface, the author explained that "'It has been my endeavor to form a catalogue for a small and cheap library, intended to suit the tastes and circumstances of common readers; many valuable works in the higher departments of science have been intentionally omitted.'" Just the fact of publication of this catalogue is evidence of the growth and importance of social libraries at this time. Its suggested lists reflect the wide variety of reading interests of the members. It was divided into 23 sub-classes, including one titled miscellanies. History, biography, travel, natural science, contemporary literature and fiction predominated the content of social libraries. They also contained current periodicals and pamphlets, and both English and local American newspapers. There was

---

[1]Shera. pp. 106-109.

[2]Ibid. p. 110.

[3]Ibid. p. 112.

an emphasis upon prevailing cultural and social movements. A goodly number of religious works were still included; however, their actual use by members indicated that they could not be rated as being popularly read. It has been speculated that when they were read, it was due to the fact that at this time, before sociology had been developed; religious works were the greatest source of information about man as he related to other men.[1]

The social libraries emerged in New England around the 1750's, which by that time had developed an economic environment which could support them. Fifty existed in New England before 1780; but due to conditions created by the Revolutionary War, the major growth in numbers of social libraries did not occur until after 1790. Between 1790 and 1815 at least 500 were organized in New England, with every town having at least one. Although widespread, they remained small. The vast majority of them had only a few hundred volumes. Massachusetts in 1802 had about 100 social libraries. They "reached into every literate class of society...brought entertainment and pleasure, but essentially it was a manifestation or earnest desire for education, the gateway to equality and to success."[2]

Thirty-two citizens of Wayland were in the main stream of the library movement in New England when in 1796, they established the East Sudbury Social Library. The seed which would later germinate into a free public town library could be seen in their stated purpose for forming, as found in their first record book. They were "fully convinced that public as well as private happiness essentially depends on the general diffusion of knowledge; and that the easiest and most direct way to obtain that knowledge is by the free use of well-chosen books."[3] The society was

---

[1]Shera. pp. 105, 114-115.

[2]Thompson. p. 65.

[3]"East Sudbury Social Library Record Book" (Wayland, Massachusetts: 1796), n.p. (Wayland Town Library).

conceived of and brought to fruition under the leadership of Rev. Josiah Bridge, minister of the local church. He continually served in a position of leadership, as chairman on the five man board of directors and also served throughout the rest of his life as the society's purchasing agent.[1]

The first invoice of 36 books was purchased with the fund created by the $4.00 membership fee. Annual dues of 25¢ were used for later expansion of the collection and to pay the librarian his annual salary of $2.00. Books were kept in the homes of the successive librarians, where the members came once a month to take them out and exchange them. On opening day 28 volumes, one per member, were circulated. A book could be held for three months; but if it were returned after 3:00 p.m. on the due date, a fine of 33¢ would be levied. A fine, equal to the value of the book, was also levied against any member who loaned a library book to a non-member. This library's content, although small, was varied. It included such books as Wright's Lady's Miscellany, Voltaire's Charles XII, Smith's Wealth of Nations, Travels in Europe, Asia, and Africa, and Studies in Nature.[2]

Historian Shera says when speaking about the library movement in general, that "the same group within the population who, for their own benefit had fostered social libraries later pressed for the creation of public libraries."[3] This certainly applied to Wayland's library history. In 1832 the board of directors of the social library had been reduced to three men, two of whose names would later appear prominantly in the town's free public library movement. And each of the men who served as librarian between 1832 and 1843 would later be actively engaged in some way.

For almost a century the proprietor form of social library was the only agency making an attempt to meet the reading needs of the people; but

---

[1] Alfred Wayland Cutting, An Historical Address Delivered in the First Parish Church, Wayland, Massachusetts, Sunday, June 25, 1911. (Boston: Press of Geo. H. Ellis Company, 1911), pp. 21-22.

[2] "Social Library Record Book.". passim.

[3] Shera. p. [illegible]

around 1820 the subscription form of library gained in popularity, with many being established. Some proprietor libraries changed form or became a blend of both. The pure subscription form required only the payment of annual membership fees and offered the privileges of use but not part ownership. In this way library service was extended to those unable or unwilling to invest in stock. Subscription libraries could more adequately meet the needs of a less homogeneous and more transient community, and they were created as an adaptation to a changing society.[1]

All newly established pure social libraries became more and more specialized to meet specific needs. Probably the first historical society library in the country was started in Massachusetts in 1791. The American Academy of Art and Science located in Boston, The Boston Society of Natural History, and the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, all, soon after their founding, had very large libraries.[2] As social libraries became specialized to meet diverse reading needs and interests they

> contributed to the development of the concept of the public library. Each was within itself the crystallization of a desire, or cluster of desires, that when added to its fellows composed a totality of forces that converged to bring tax support for a truly public library service.[3]

At the beginning of the 1800's, a specific type of proprietary library called an "athenaeum" was established. Its distinct purpose, as illustrated by the Boston Athenaeum, was not circulation, but to create "an agreeable place of resort...opportunities of literary intercourse, and the pleasure of perusing the principal European and American periodical publications, at an expense not exceeding that of a single daily paper."[4] The athenaeum, with its reading room, while emphasizing the esthetic,

---

[1]Thompson. p. 55.

[2]Johnson. pp. 366, 368.

[3]Shera. pp. 71-72.

[4]Thompson. pp. 68-70.

cultural, and intellectual, also met the needs of the general culture and increased a desire for reading for intellectual stimulation. It also helped overcome provincialism by providing foreign publications. This resulted in a drawing closer together the culture of the scholar and the popular taste of the masses, because the athenaeum met the needs of both.[1]

Other social libraries were formed to meet newly created needs which arose out of the agricultural and industrial revolutions and the subsequent development of urbanization. The first mercantile libraries in America were founded in New York and Boston in the year 1820. The mercantile class had obtained their position without requiring formal education, and this led to one of the fastest growing classes of society being on an intellectual level below average. At the same time, people generally accepted that a correlation existed between reading and general material success. Business interests willingly supported libraries in an educational effort to improve the status of workers, and wage-earners willingly paid the small annual membership fee in the hopes of bettering their positions. Mercantile and mechanics libraries needed and had patronage, but they were largely supported and administered by their young members. Changes caused by increased manufacturing resulted in the demise of the true apprentice-master relationship, and a need arose for vocational training. However, libraries of a vocational nature had a short existence. When the desired results of greatly improved skills or increased income failed to materialize, libraries broadened their range of reading material and developed into general subscription libraries, rather than vocational collections. However, they became widespread and in the 1800's were the best library service available. They continued long after free public libraries were established. In some instances, the working class

---

[1]Ibid. pp. 74-75.

[2]Ibid. pp. 98, 108.

started libraries on their own. Mill workers, particularly in the mills which employed ex-farm girls, began subscription libraries on their own initiative in an attempt to gain culture. In some mills, perhaps in an attempt to appear benevolent or progressive, management imposed subscription fees upon all workers. After the initial desire for culture passed, fiction was read most often; and these libraries became very general.[1] While not overwhelmingly successful at founding their own libraries, the working class, which was fast growing, created "increasing pressure for any agency that would raise the apprentice out of the rank of the day laborer and into the middle class... [and] as education was regarded by all as the panacea for every social ill,"[2] the argument for the public library was strengthened.

Motivated by a desire to correct or prevent social ills which could be brought about by conditions caused by the new industrialization and by a desire to make useful citizens out of an underprivileged class, philanthropic men founded, owned and administered libraries as a charitable endeavor. This was in keeping with the growing humanitarian movement in society in general and with the high value then being placed upon education for all people. The most common of these were the apprentice libraries and the factory owned library, provided for the benefit of the workers.[3] The books contained in these libraries show that they were not intended to promote high scholarship, but rather to develop a general interest in reading by providing books for practical and pleasurable reading. However, as one man who made the selection of books for a Massachusetts manufacturing

---

[1] Shera. pp. 229-236.

[2] Shera. p. 237.; Sidney Ditzion, Arsenals of A Democratic Culture, A Social History of the American Public Library Movement in New England and The Middle States From 1850-1900 (Chicago: American Library Association, 1947), p. 110.

[3] Thompson. pp. 97, 81.

company library said, that lest someone be surprised at the high reading level indicated by his choices, "that nearly all the persons employed in these mills are Americans, chiefly from the country towns of New England, and have, therefore almost without exception, received the elements of a good English education in New England common schools."[1] He included one good book of reference in the various fields of intellectual study; but judging, that after a hard day's labor, the working class was not up to a great amount of intellectual exertion, he provided a large supply of good novels for their amusement. This library was diligently used by the workers. He said that "light reading for amusement merely, is not only harmless but eminently useful."[2] This contemporary's assessment affirms 20th century historian Ditzion's statement that the

> American workingmen in field and factory justly merited their reputation as readers of books. Their response to the opening of free libraries affirmed what European observers had repeatedly said about the superior intellectual habits of the American working class... [however,] library statistics demonstrated that reading for entertainment was the order of the day."[3]

Wayland, being a small rural farm community in the early 1800's, had no need for a mercantile or factory library, but it did have a charitable library established by the Rev. John Burt Wight in 1815. When he came to Wayland as the minister of the First Parish Church, he became a member and served on the board of dirctors of the existing social library. In his reminisences years later he said that "it contained some of the best books to be obtained, and had for many years been diffusing useful information and mental cultivation among the people."[4] But, Wight had a clear and enlarged view of the value of books. He believed that the use

---

[1] W. P. Atkinson, Books and Reading: A Lecture (Boston: Crosby, Nichols, Lee and Company, 1860), p. 3.

[2] Ibid. pp. 19-20.

[3] Ditzion. p. 127.

[4] John Burt Wight, "Reminisances of John B. Wight," in Sermons Preached in and About Wayland, comp. W. M. Salter (Boston: T & J Fleet, 1876) p. 11.

and access to books should be absolutely free. Therefore, he found the provisions of the existing social library, where circulation was limited to the paying proprietors, inadequate. Thus, he began the formation of a library which would be free and available to all the citizens of the town and unrelated to one's ability to pay. Starting mainly with a contribution of books from his own personal library, he purchased others with funds collected by ladies in each of the school districts, for the specific purpose of starting a library of books on moral and religious subjects.[1]

It appears that Wight was using both wisdom and psychology. As the minister, he was by custom automatically also the chairman of the school committee and superintendent of schools. Rather than just personally soliciting donations, he directly involved the members of the community, who were geographically dispersed throughout the entire town by school districts. At a later time he would expound upon the theory he held that, for a public library to succeed, it needs the personal involvement of the people it serves. One might also suspect that while he may have spoken to the women of the school districts about the need for a religious library, and thereby won their enthusiasm; that from its origins, he probably had a much broader, but unrevealed, plan than a simple church library. He was a bibliomaniac and his own personal collection contained many volumes other than religion and theology. After founding the East Sudbury Charitable Library, which was kept in his own home until he retired as minister and to which he gave his personal attention; he still remained vitally active in the town's proprietary library. The charitable library although composed largely of religious or moral works at first, grew to become more

---

[1] James S. Draper, comp.,"Wayland Town Library Scrapbook with Historical Notes" (Wayland, Massachusetts: 1878), found in the Wayland Town Library, p. 22.; Wight. "Reminisances." pp. 13-14.

general. As Wight himself said: "After a number of years, this social library was enlarged by the addition of a considerable number of modern and popular works. Some of the best of these were entirely worn out by constant use."[1] It is interesting to note that Wight used the words social library rather than church library when he described it. And, that is probably what he had intended from the first.

Unlike many church libraries, the books of the East Sudbury Charitable Library circulated. In one, and only one respect, however, it was typical of the church or Sunday School libraries which were common at this and an earlier time. It provided for many the first and/or only exposure and access to books at an early age, which fostered a habit of reading. Although this library was not a juvenile library because its books were for all age levels, people were to later say that their love of reading began here as a youth. As one such man said in 1878:

> I feel that I was fortunate in having my lot cast in this community a half century ago. The parish library [Charitable Library] and the social library, with which I early became acquainted...were treasures, I imagine, which but few towns possessed.[2]

The expansion of the library occurred through donations of books, which Wight actively solicited, and through purchases made with money donated when collections were occasionally made at the meeting house. It eventually reached about 300 volumes and served the community for more than fifteen years. Upon Wights retirement, it was moved to the vestibule of the meeting house where it suffered from neglect and books were lost. It had by the definition of that day, however, been the town's free public library.

---

[1] Wight."Reminisances." p. 14.

[2] Town of Wayland, Proceedings at the Dedication of the Town Hall, Wayland, December 24, 1878 (Wayland, Massachusetts: n.p., 1879), p. 46.

While the East Sudbury Charitable Library was not a church library in the usual sense, it was representative of the part played by organized religion in the development of the library movement. New England religion from the beginning had been bookish and promoted the belief that reading built character, and was a good thing in and of itself. With the development of Unitarianism, religious emphasis on the intellect became even greater. As old dogmas were tempered and the traditional religion and church of New England became more liberalized, the Unitarian religion developed as a result of an evolutionary religious process. With it came a new philosophy regarding man in his relationship with his fellow man. Improvement and enlightenment of the masses became the concern of all, with emphasis on individual moral worth and self-improvement.[1] Unitarianism fostered and supported the belief that "the only true function of government was to nurture the individual in his intellectual and economic growth."[2] A 1787 sermon preached in Massachusetts stated that "man is capable of improving in knowledge as long as he enjoys the means of materials of improvement. Indeed he has the power to improve the smallest stock forever."[3] Clergy became personally involved in the library movement and

> their more significant work is shown in the concrete local activities which both preceded the establishment of libraries and nurtured their early days. A religious group might turn its collection to public use. A pastor's wife might start a collection toward a free library. An influential minister might initiate a movement to establish a town library."[4]

In Wayland, Rev. Wight had initiated the movement to form the first library for the use of the whole town. While his wife did not start a collection, a group of women of the congregation did. It is significant to

---

[1]Shera. pp. 87-88, 238.

[2]Ditzion. p. 52.

[3]Thompson. p. 62.

[4]Ditzion. pp. 62-63.

note that Rev. Wight was an early convert to the Unitarian faith and that a large majority of his Wayland parishioners supported him when he made the change. When he began his ministry at First Parish in 1815, it was the only church in town. In 1828 when the issue of Calvinistic vs. Unitarian belief came to a head and Wight stood firmly for Unitarianism, only eighteen members withdrew to form a new church based on the older traditions. Wayland had definitely become a Unitarian town, as had a majority of other New England communities; and this progressive religion influenced people toward support of humanitarian and educational movements.[1]

During the same time period as the social libraries, circulating libraries were operating in New England. After the Revolutionary War, their numbers greatly increased with the coming of social and economic stability. These were rental libraries with the sole purpose of profit for the owner. They were usually run in conjunction with another business, such as the selling of books, hats, medicines, etc. As no desire existed for bringing about cultural, moral, or intellectual improvement, they catered simply to popular tastes. Their catalogues reveal books of broad general interest, with mainly fiction and novels. A small rental fee was charged for the use of each book or for a number of books during a prescribed time period. Circulating libraries were an economically efficient method of book distribution, and all of the larger cities and towns had at least one. It is possible that the circulating library, in always responding to current popular demands and by at least partially meeting the people's library needs, did in fact, delay the appearance of the free public library.[2] "There was little relationship of motive and no historical connection between the circulating and the later public library.

---

1. Cutting. p. 26.; Ditzion. p.53.

2. Shera. pp. 127, 140-145.

But because they were competitors for popular support, the former probably encouraged the latter to respond more quickly to current demands for ephemeral books."[1]

In the first half of the 19th century,

> A period of rapid growth and change and readjustment in American life, many efforts were made to secure more abundent provision of libraries, and through them to improve both the intellectual and moral character of the people; and to promote the equality of opportunity...but only after three decades of experimentation could the idea of a free library, accessible to all classes alike, begin to find general acceptance.[2]

In a few scattered Massachusetts municipalities various experiments in town support of libraries were made. Lexington in 1827 voted an appropriation of $60 which was used to purchase books and pay a librarian for a town juvenile library, which was housed in the church. It received small and irregular municipal appropriations; but not enough financial support for it to survive, and it passed out of existence in 1839. Pressure for its establishment had come from members of a voluntary library association, and it never did gain full support of the entire town's population. Nonetheless, Lexington was the first public treasury in Massachusetts to support a library.[3] Fall River in 1835 used a small portion of their share of the U. S. Deposit Fund to purchase shares in the local social library to be granted as scholarships to deserving students. In 1837 Arlington voted $30 annually to support the West Cambridge Juvenile Library which was legally under the control of the selectmen, ministers, and physicians of the town. The donor of the books which established this library had left them to a board of trustees rather than to the Town of Arlington. The town appropriation was made conditional upon the books being made available to all of the residents. Both of these towns were

---

[1] Ibid. p. 154.

[2] Thompson, pp. 78-79.

[3] Shera. p. 160.; Johnson. p. 318.

early examples of municipal aid to existing social libraries. Often the practice of a town supporting or taking over an already existing library form came before towns actually began initiating public libraries by municipal action, but this was a step in that direction. In all of these early examples, the key factors necessary to the development and effective functioning of a free public library was lacking. Permanence and stability through guaranteed continual public support was still missing.[1]

The New England library situation was surveyed by educator, Horace Mann prior to 1840 and found deficient. Through his efforts the seed was planted in the minds of many New Englanders that public support of libraries was essential, and the connection between libraries and public education was accepted. His belief, that reading for practical knowledge and amusement was of educational value, also came to have greater acceptance.[2]

Because of Mann and the example set by the New York legislature two years earlier, Massachusetts in 1837 passed the School District Library Law which allowed, but did not require, each school district to levy a total tax of $30 the first year and $10 each year thereafter upon its residents. The school committees would select, purchase and control the books for the use of the children of their district. Popular sentiment led to only limited acceptance at first. By 1842 only about 300 districts had established libraries. Due to this indifference, the state passed new legislation; and using federal monies granted to the states by the U. S. Deposit fund, offered to any school district which would establish a library the sum of $15 if the district would raise an equal amount. This incentive did have a positive effect, for by 1846 nearly two-thirds of the school districts in the state had established libraries. By 1850

---

[1]Shera. p. 161 [2]Ibid. pp. 223-225.

there were about 700 and averaged about fifty volumes each. Libraries were now seen as a supplement to public education and were meant to serve mainly adolescents and adults. Even later, the early free town libraries would generally limit their membership to those over the age of fourteen or sixteen. Only after having been in operation for a number of years did the trustees modify the rules to extend the library privileges to younger readers.[1] The content of these libraries was limited to textbooks, general works and some inspirational volumes. The level of the books was usually beyond the ability of most students, but neither was it geared to popular tastes of adults. School district libraries were exploited by publishers who often compiled special sets of works, which were monotonous and lacked popular appeal; but the purchase of these sets usually involved the expenditure of all available funds. Throughout the nation the school district libraries can only be rated as a failure; but Massachusetts in this endeavor attained more genuine success than other states.[2] As the legislation was permissive, "libraries were purchased only in districts where public sentiment approved; aid from the state was confined to an amount small enough to give no incentive for waste, but large enough to be an important supplement to local funds; and the total amount available permitted purchase of enough books to meet immediate needs fairly well."[3] Massachusetts legislation allowed each district to have its own use regulations. Some districts charged adults a fee for the use of each book or were like Lowell, which charged an annual 50¢ fee for all users. In 1844 this town used the money available to them from the state for school district libraries and an additional municipal appropriation of $2,000 to establish a city-school library. It was governed by a board

---

[1] Ditzion. p. 96.

[2] Shera. p. 183.; Thompson. pp. 133-135.; Johnson. p. 324.

[3] Thompson. pp. 135-136.

appointed by the city council rather than by the school committee.[1] Had it not been for the 50¢ charge, Lowell would be able to lay claim to being the first modern free public library in the state.

Lowell overcame two major criticisims of school district libraries which led to their eventual demise - the unit of administration and scope was too small, which resulted in the collections being of a very small size; and administration by school committee members was ineffective because their primary concern was the school rather than the library for the general public.[2] Another factor contributing to their failure was public apathy. These libraries were rarely expanded beyond the original collection; and as no building or staff was provided for, many district libraries ended up in the home of a school committee member or teacher, fairly inaccessible and often uncared for. This movement was premature and did not win the necessary popular support, but it did create the precedent of local taxation on a wide scale to provide a form of library service and of state aid to libraries. Henceforth, the library was recognized as an educational service to adults. The school district libraries helped to pave the way for the genuine public libraries which would come later.[3]

The Town of Wayland in its initiation of school district libraries was quite typical. It did not respond to the first state legislation permitting them; but it waited, as did most towns, until after the passage of the act which provided state aid before taking any action. Town meeting in 1843 appointed a committee of two, Edward Mellen and Leonard Frost, to purchase books for a library for each of the six school districts; however, it was not until 1845, when the town added to the

---

1. Shera. p. 161.

[2]Raymond Kilpela, "The Present Status of the School District Libraries." School Libraries 18 (Summer 1969): 11.

[3]Johnson. p. 325.; Shera. p. 184.

committee the three members of the school board that the actual purchases were made and a code of regulations adopted for the use of these books by scholars and others. Each common school had a different set of books which numbered around 60 volumes. These were annually rotated among the schools and were valued and read by both children and adults in all but one or two of the districts.[1]

Simultaneous to the beginning of school district libraries, prominent educators were expanding the common school system through the up-dating of textbooks and the addition of new subjects, with the "public high schools teaching history, chemistry, geology and the various branches of 'natural' and 'moral' philosophy."[2] Rev. Wight, as school committee chairman, introduced new books he thought were necessary or expedient. He said:

> It seemed to me that those who had made great proficiency in these necessary branches of knowledge, ought to be advanced to newer and higher studies and these necessary books were introduced, and in a few years a considerable number of the older scholars began to study the elementary books of astronomy, natural-philosophy, chemistry, botany, moral philosophy, rhetoric and universal history. The books they studied had been carefully prepared for the use of high schools, and they could not fail to achieve for them a general enlargement of mind, as well as much valuable information.[3]

From 1800 onward, there existed throughout all of Massachusetts some source of reading material available at a relatively low cost, in the form of proprietary, subscription, variations of these, circulating, or school district libraries. In addition, most social libraries earnestly attempted to extend their services to the entire community. They either ignored their restrictive rules for use or allowed use of their collections by the general public at specific times. But no matter how strong their sense of responsibility, social libraries of any form and

---

[1] Draper, "Library Scrapbook". p. 20.; Town of Wayland, Dedication pp. 76-77.

[2] Ditzion. p. 78.

[3] Wight, "Reminisances". p. 31.

school district libraries had only limited financial resources. They were unable to grow beyond small and limited collections; and so they could not possibly meet the rapidly growing reading needs of the community. All of these social libraries had a weak economic base, and their fortunes rose and fell with the general economic conditions of society. "Operating as they did on revenues derived from property rentals, security investments and annual membership fees, subscription institutions suffered acutely in every financial, business and real estate depression."[1] While they were normally tax exempt, they were often assessed by towns when the towns needed additional revenue during times of distress. At the same time, subscribers, not being able to afford the fee, dropped off. Economic depression with its accompanying unemployment was the time when library service was most needed, as it could supply the needed technical and vocational books. But it was at this time that voluntary or circulating libraries proved most inadequate. As a less secure wage-earning class developed in New England as a result of the change to a manufacturing economy, the need for governmental responsibility was recognized.[2]

A new era was developing where equal privilege was no longer possible due to increasing distinctions between classes. The social library, which had adequately met the needs of a small, homogeneous community where wealth was fairly evenly distributed and social distinctions were slight, could not satisfy the needs of a community when society grew more complex and inequality of means led to an undemocratic inequality of privilege. In 1841 a Boston newspaper said: "'It cannot be denied that literature in this city - in this state - in this country, is an Aristocracy. The riches which are gathered by the labors of years, and treasured up in our libraries and halls of scientific institutions, are accessible to but few, very few.'"[3]

---

[1] Ditzion. p. 49.
[2] Ibid. pp. 49-50.
[3] Thompson. pp. 64-77.

Starting in 1830, the wave of 19th century industrialism began to invade the southern portion of Wayland with the growth of a shoe industry there. The former homogeneous farming community was changed with the influx of factory workers. In time, the homes of the wealthy factory owners stood in contrast to the worker's boarding houses and tenements. Class distinctions were coming to the Town of Wayland also.

Based only upon voluntary support, social libraries also suffered because of their inability to maintain the initial enthusiasms of their founders. John B. Wight in arguing for the need for free public libraries, described this inadequacy of the social library. He said:

> For a few years after the formation of the library everything goes well. Its books are read with avidity. New books are occasionally added. Those who have shares find it pleasant and improving to participate in its advantages. But before many years its prosperity begins to decline. Some of the proprietors have deceased. Others have removed from the town. Others have been unfortunate in business. The annual assessments cease to be paid. New publications are no longer purchased. The library gradually falls into disuse... Then the old library is reorganized or a new one formed, to pass through a similar course of growth, decline and neglect.[1]

What Wight said of social libraries in general, he had observed firsthand in the social library in Wayland. Its membership and use fluctuated over the years. Initially it had much use, but interest dwindled, and in 1811 only six members used the books over a three month period of time. Experimentation with policy seemed to be ongoing. In 1821 when the membership fee was made $3 and the annual assessment raised to 50¢, interest revived. At this time 21 of the original members still belonged but few new members had joined. The 50¢ dues apparently didn't help; for three years later it was again placed at 25¢. Economic factors definitely caused difficulties for the library, and in 1832 the membership fee was dropped to only $2. This resulted in 17 new memberships and the purchase

---

[1] Rev. John Burt Wight, "A Lecture on Public Libraries Delivered in Boston in the Hall of the House of Representatives 1854, and In Several Other Places." n.p. Found in the Wayland Historical Society, Folio # 18. (Handwritten)

of a 41 volume set of Scott's novels and 17 volumes of the Harper's Family Library Service. The library then contained a total of 227 books. Several breaks in the records appear in the Record Book over the years, which might indicate periods of total inactivity of book circulation. The fact that these breaks in the records tended to follow periods of decreased activity and immediately preceded the establishment of new library regulations would bear this supposition out. Wayland's social library was typical in that its collection remained relatively small, its membership never expanded much beyond the original number, and the initial enthusiasm of the founders was hard to maintain.[1]

As the demand for books began increasing, existing library forms could not meet the need. A number of factors contributed to this new demand, the most important being the renaissance in public education which came about ater 1840. Until this time, even in New England only a minor portion of the school population was being educated in the public schools. Conditions were such that they encouraged all who could afford it to send their children to private schools.[2] Francis Wayland, the philanthropist who gave the Wayland Town Library its start, was one educational reformer who strongly supported public school improvement. It was his belief that the wealthy and middle-class were in effect being doublyty taxed, as they had to support public educations for the poor as well as pay for their own children in private schools. If all taxpayers were required to pay for a service such as education, that service, he believed, should be of a quality that would meet the needs of all. He was also concerned that private schools would tend to create in this country an undemocratic class structure.[3] Upgrading of public education

---

[1] "East Sudbury Social Library Record Book"

[2] Shera. pp. 221-222.

[3] Ditzion. p. 10.

aided the public library movement in several ways. With major reforms in the common schools, a much larger literate public resulted. Free public education for all provided by general taxation had conditioned the people to the idea of paying taxes to promote the general welfare. Lastly, the public library was seen as a supplement to a common school education - a logical extension. Therefore, it gained wholehearted support of the educators. The Trustees of the Boston Public Library in their first report stated: "'That all the reasons which exist for furnishing the means of elementary education, at the public expense, apply in an equal degree to a reasonable provision to aid and encourage the acquisition of the knowledge required to complete a preparation for active life or to perform its duties.'"[1] The growing high esteem for popular education felt throughout all of the New England population was incompatible with the restrictive fees of social libraries.[2]

In many respects the public library was the most practical method of extending educational benefits. It was claimed that free accessibility to books would raise the general reading level of the people. Teachers were scarce, so books were necessary, and access to books could at the same time improve the quality of teachers. All the leaders in the public library movement "emphasized the fact that Massachusetts towns were providing free education up to the point where it could most profitably be utilized and then were leaving the youth to its own resources."[3] Ticknor, one of the founders of the Boston Public Library said that "a free public library if adapted to the wants of our people, would be the crowning glory of the public schools.'"[4]

---

[1]Shera. p. 274.
[2]Ibid. p. 125.
[3]Ditzion. pp. 22, 87.
[4]Thompson. p. 180.

The prominent ideological systems in New England all supported public education, but upheld national individualism, making it impossible to have a unified plan of higher education. The diversity of coexisting groups and sects in all areas of the New England culture meant that "the only idea which was acceptable to all... was that of 'self-culture'"[1] With a free public library every man could pursue an elective course of study, and this provision of educational opportunity could be given to all, both practically and economically.[2]

Advanced technology in printing and publishing had resulted in the availability of a wide range of books at moderate cost. Social libraries, lectures, lyceum societies, and college extension programs had all stimulated an interest in reading and in education. The new manufacturing interests of New England required a level of education heretofore unnecessary, and books were needed to promote intelligent and successful workmanship. A revolution had occurred in applied science and technology, and useful knowledge was now highly valued as the key to social improvement.[3] At this same time, the scholar and the historian, both amateur and professional, had a need for better research resources because of the new intellectual awakening. Intense interest in scholarship, in historical inquiry and research, which was heightened by a new nationalism, created an enthusiasm for the past and a desire to preserve it. Existing library institutions were inadequate to meet this research need. Foreign and native criticism was embarrassing. As Fisher Ames, an American politician said: "'All our universities would not suffice to supply them for such a work as Gibbons'"[4] This comment was to be often seized

---

[1] Ditzion. p. 53.
[2] Ibid. p. 86.
[3] Ibid. pp. 173, 56.
[4] Shera. pp. 206-210.

upon and used by supporters of the public library movement.

> This intellectual awakening in New England was made manifest in a wide-spread, constantly increasing desire for more efficient means for diffusion of knowledge; and on the higher cultural levels in a desire for more adequate resources for creative work. Though seemingly, at first unrelated, and though incapable of ever completely blending, these desires came gradually into close union; and from their co-mingling came the higher conceptions and the broader purposes, which gave birth to what was called the modern library movement.[1]

With ideologies that affirmed the perfectability of man, New Englanders came to value self-education. The need for universal education was recognized and appealed to the popular mind. Finally, the library had become important to the masses. Conservation and availability of adequate resources were the appeal and need of the scholar, which could only be met through the public supported library. Rev. Wight was to use the importance of libraries as depositories for rare works and historical documents as one of his arguments for public libraries. A practical recognition of this need was demonstrated with the building in 1826 of the Massachusetts State Library to provide a place to deposit official state documents.[2]

At last the element of desirability existed in New England. Until a majority of the people needed and wanted the services which the modern public library could offer, it was impossible for it to come into existence. And, once the education and welfare of all the people became of great importance, the modern public library was the only effective method to achieve this end.[3] The School District Library Law had proved that legislative action alone could not bring about free library establishment. "It awaited, too, more general acceptance of the idea that it is a proper community function to do, for all the people, what proprietary and subscription libraries were doing for all who paid for it; to provide means of education

---

[1]Thompson. pp. 150-151.

[2]Shera. pp. 212-213.

[3]Ibid. pp. 216-217.

and wholesome recreation."[1] The social library from the beginning had the essential characteristics of a public library system, save accessibility to all. It was more than a forerunner, for it was an important factor in the evolution of the free public library.[2]

An agricultural revolution, mercantilism and industry bringing economic prosperity, an early maturity, urbanization through concentration, and a dominant ideology that affirmed popular and universal education and thereby created a desire for libraries were all present in the late 1840's in New England. These necessary elements for a successful public library were present, and all that was needed was the strong leadership of men of vision to stimulate desire and effort.[3] As Wight said in 1853:

> Nor is the establishment of public libraries premature. The people are prepared for their introduction by the proprietary and common-school libraries which have preceded them, and by the increasing desire of information which is spreading through all classes; and will approve them, and provide for them, and welcome them everywhere, as soon as they shall be led to consider and understand their nature and importance.[4]

The impetus and direction the library movement required came from local leadership in the small towns. This cumulative influence supplied the needed thrust and support. These local leaders were usually professionals, who had the greatest need of resources and were also the most likely to benefit from a public library. They held positions of influence in their communities and had the opportunity to publicly express favorable sentiments. The strongest supporters were scholars, local schoolmen, clergy, lawyers, doctors, and historians; who involved themselves in a variety of ways.[5]

---

[1] Thompson. p. 147.

[2] Shera. p. 126.

[3] Ibid. p. 15.

[4] Rev. John Burt Wight, Untitled Circular (Printed in Boston: January 1853: n.p.), n.p.

[5] Shera. pp. 240-244.; Ditzion. p. 92.

Involvement of the Wayland clergy in the town's earliest library endeavors has already been noted. Its free public library began with a donation from the President of Brown University, the Rev. Dr. Francis Wayland. Locally the move to establish the library was spearheaded by the lawyer and judge, Edward Mellen. Historian James S. Draper canvassed the town for subscriptions for the library; but also, he served as its first treasurer and its second librarian. These men, as well as Rev. J. B. Wight, served on the various committees which were formed to make the necessary arrangements for starting the library; and both Mellen and Draper were among its first officers. While the main thrust in the library was local, prominent men, particularly the intellectuals like Dr. Wayland, did play an important role. They were articulate in expressing the sentiments of local leaders who needed "goading and support from prominent citizens before they would translate their sentiments into appropriations."[1]

Francis Wayland's goading to the town's local leaders took a very practical and tangible form - a gift of money. His support for the establishment of a free town library came from his often expressed philosophy and ideology. He believed in education of any type, and he considered it society's duty to make available any means of instruction in the highest possible degree. He saw that intelligence and virtue were necessary for equal rights and that the American working class were culturally superior to their European counterparts. This he attributed to the American equality of access to educational opportunity. Increasing estrangement between the leisure and laboring classes and between the rich and the poor, Wayland saw as a threat to the American political democracy. Universal cultivation of the intellect was, he believed, the means to protect American religious, social and political institutions from danger. His theory was that a new

---

[1]Ditzion. pp. 8-9.

order was needed where merit would be based on intellectual culture rather than wealth. He viewed the public library as an equalizer of educational opportunity. In 1838 he had unsuccessfully urged the Providence Athenaeum to extend its services to the entire community.[1]

While the Rev. Dr. Wayland, and almost all of the leaders of the public library movement, who were educated and elitist, spoke in the most democratic terms of providing the greatest advantage for the mass of the people and of the general welfare, they were motivated by a fear of the political powers of the uneducated masses. With disestablishment of the church in New England, the sufferage had been greatly expanded; and by mid-century the general populace wielded considerable political power. The springing up of reactionary religious and political ideas, combined with the recent influx of immigrants, posed a threat in the eyes of New England leaders. A popular democracy required an educated and informed populace, and support for the public library was argued on the grounds of it being a democratic necessity. It could serve to educate the people politically. It would be a steadying element in times of emotional and intellectual ferment. And as an intellectual and literary meeting ground, where both rich and poor would gather on equal terms, it might neutralize the dangers which might arise from their divergent interests. Increasing democratic conditions in New England did bring about growth of the free public library; but the leaders were seeking a solution to the problems created by this, rather than simply proposing a further extension of that democratic spirit. Their aim was to give proper direction to the masses to prevent their misuse of political power. Education could temper the impetuosity of the new voters. Public libraries were to be Americanizing institutions, or as historian Ditzion called them, "the arsenals of

---

[1] Ditzion. pp. 11-12.

American Liberty." This new agency had become necessary because in a functioning democratic society, "where every individual thought and deed affected the social mechanism of the whole, it became the interest of the whole to provide the necessary education for its parts."[1] No other agency existed to fill this need of educating the voting population so that they could make intelligent and informed decisions. The public library of political necessity was to become the recipient of public support.

Boston leader, George Ticknor

> saw an urgent need to 'assimilate their masses' (the immigrants) and bring 'them in willing subjection to our own institutions.' He felt that the 'remedy for this influx of ignorance' was education. Belief in the libraries potential as one means of restraining the 'dangerous classes' and inhibiting the chances of unscrupulous politicians who would lead the ignorant astray, explain his insistence that the public library be as popular in appeal as possible."[2]

The founders of the American public library saw it as a stabilizing agent in society. Almost every early declaration supporting it placed heavy emphasis upon the library's ability to be a preserver of virtue by providing wholesome entertainment. Time spent reading might otherwise be spent in idleness or vice. Novels and fiction on the shelves were justified, for they were "preferable to the 'vicious' entertainment designed to satisfy the 'lower impulses in human nature.'"[3] The library movement won the support of those involved in the growing humanitarian movement which developed simultaneously when industrial progress and its dislocations created a number of social ills. The library was looked upon as a "fairy wand of social reform."[4], and library people and humanitarians shared the belief in public responsibility for the general

---

[1]Ditzion. pp. 52, 60, 65-66.

[2]Michael Harris, "The Purpose of the American Public Library, a Revisionist Interpretation." Library Journal (September 15, 1973):2510.

[3]Ibid. p. 2511.

[4]Ditzion. p.24.

welfare. They also shared the aims of driving immoral literature off the market, putting saloons out of business, and using money for a method of crime prevention rather than spending it on punishment of crime. This latter aim appealed to the public pocketbook as well. The directors of the Lowell Library in petitioning for a free one said that "'the city levied taxes to punish crime, why should it not do the same to prevent crime?'"[1] Some of the leaders of both movements were identical, and Francis Wayland was himself a strong temperance movement man.

Wayland's theory was that intelligent people would be virtuous and virtuous people would, of course, be religious. To him the library would be a milestone in achieving a virtuous and religious society.[2] Wight in his speech before the General Court claimed that libraries would "be favorable to all the moral reforms of the day, by leading to more domestic habits of life, by diminishing the circulation of low and immoral publications and by producing higher and more worthy views of the capabilities of human nature."[3] Healthy general reading, Ticknor believed, "would contribute to 'moral and intellectual improvement' among the 'middling classes.' His goal was to contribute to the 'uplift' of the masses, to make men sober, righteous, conservative, patient, and devout - in short, to make others more like himself."[4]

Ticknor was also the man most responsible for forming the policies by which the Boston Public Library would operate, and which made this library a "model both for general public policy and technical library practice."[5] This policy and practice would be to assume responsibility

---

[1]Ibid. pp. 102-103.

[2]Ibid. p. 12

[3]William B. Fowle, Ed., "Our Common School System, Public Libraries." The Common School Journal 13 New Series (September 1851):261.

[4]Harris. p. 2510.

[5]Ditzion. p. 13.

for supplying books for popular consumption, based on popular taste, and with library services based upon accomodation to the public's convenience. Ticknor said that the library should be aimed at the common man by including a variety of popular and contemporary works, with several copies of each to enable wide circulation. The library facilities should be accessible and open hours that would be most convenient to the general public. The needs of all the people were to be met, but Ticknor said: "'The first regard should be shown, as in the case of our Free Schools, to the wants of those, who can in no other way supply themselves with the interesting and healthy reading necessary for their further education.'"[1] Ticknor's approach was novel and was at the time, and still is, cited as representing a true democratic spirit. It thus adds to the myth "that the public library movement began in a passion of liberal and humanitarian zeal."[2] In fact, Ticknor, Wayland, and most of the other founders of public libraries were elitist and practical men, as well. If the library was to fulfill its purpose as they saw it - to politically restrain the masses and to elevate them to a cultural level more nearly close to their own, it was essential that the masses would use the libraries once they were established. Supplying popular reading matter was the enticement; and it was hoped that with this as a beginning, the masses would improve their reading tastes.[3]

Other practical considerations entered the picture. Public libraries could not succeed unless the general public desired them and was willing to vote the necessary appropriations. The rationale was that if you won public favor by giving them what they wanted, you would win their support. Francis Wayland may have been more idealistic and/or elitist than practical than some of the other library promoters; for in 1851 he

---

[1]Thompson. p. 183.

[2]Harris. p. 2509.

[3]Ibid. p. 2511.

stated his revulsion at the Providence Athenaeum's practice of purchasing "books of at least doubtful character, frivolous and not innocent... because the young people desired them. I would as soon give a child arsenic because he liked it."[1]

Additionally, strong public support was seen as the surest way in the long run for a public library to be able to grow and expand into an excellent collection with resources for the intellectual and scholar. "Upon the fundamental principle of this policy would be shaped the ideals and methods of the American public library, endeavoring to combine the utilitarian and the recreational as closely as possible with the scholarly and the cultural."[2] Michael Harris in a revisionist interpretation claims that the motivations and resultant policies of the original founders resulted in the first public libraries being "generally cold, rigidly inflexible, and elitist institutions."[3] He contends that these attitudes continued on long after; and that because of them, "only a very small portion of the eligible users have ever crossed the threshold of a public library."[4]

Francis Wayland also held an economic theory, one that would be used frequently to support establishment of libraries. He felt that if knowledge could be disseminated faster, that agriculture, manufacturing, and mercantile trade would become more skillfully pursued and become more profitable. He and Rev. Wight were probably the most outstanding in the stressing of the economic advantages that would flow from the broadest kind of education, which they saw "as a means of achieving material supremacy through intelligent exploitation of God-given resources."[5] Wayland was concerned with the whole country and its competitive role with

---

[1]Francis Wayland to Edward Mellen, March , 1851. Wayland Historical Society. Wayland, Massachusetts.

[2]Thompson. p. 183.

[3]Harris. p. 2509.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ditzion. pp. 11, 117.

advanced nations like England and Switzerland. After Massachusetts had passed its Library Law in 1851, Wight believed that his state could become superior to all other states because of this law.[1] This economic argument had strong appeal at a time when industrial and mercantile competition among cities was great and when well-educated workers were needed in the new industries. To overcome taxpayer reluctance, which was never strongly verbalized, but which did exist as an obstacle which had to be overcome, the intellectual leadership had to gain the taxpayers' confidence by showing that continued prosperity depended upon an educated populace.[2] If a town did not educate its populace, it was pointed out that it would, in turn, lag behind in business supremacy. In the rivalry between cities and towns for economic prosperity, smaller towns,wishing to attract business or real estate capital or to retain their existing population, wanted to have libraries which served as an outward sign of growth. Wight clearly pointed out that the fact that large cities had high rentals and property values was due to their providing of commercial and intellectual opportunity and activity.[3] Playing upon this strong inter-municipal rivalry, Wight said:"To meet an objection which may arise in some few minds, before the subject is generally well understood, will not the increased value of their real estate, in consequence of having such a library, exceed a hundred fold all that they have expended in its establishment, or may yet expend in its augmentation?"[4]

Arthur Ekirch when speaking of the idea of progress and its role in the movement for universal education, quite accurately described the motivations and desires for a free public library when he said: "'To reformers it offered the hope that an educated people would adopt their

---

[1]Ditzion. p. 117.

[2]Ibid. p. 29.

[3]Ibid. pp. 29, 70-71.

[4]Fowle. p. 263.

schemes. To the underprivileged it meant a chance to rise, and to the more favored classes it seemed to preclude the possibility of violent revolution."[1]

Rev. Francis Wayland, D.D. of Providence, Rhode Island deserves the honor of being the originator of the first free public library in the state of Massachusetts, which began operation in 1850. The efforts to establish this library in the Town of Wayland led to the passage of the Massachusetts Library Act in 1851. Both these endeavors were to launch the free public library movement in Massachusetts and in the nation. The first was accomplished principally through the energies and judgements of Edward Mellen; and the second, by the efforts of Rev. John Burt Wight, who at that time was the Town of Wayland's representative to the Massachusetts Legislature. More than any other man, Wight brought the idea of the free public library to its modern day definition.[2]

It began at the 1847 commencement exercises of Brown University, which Judge Edward Mellen of Wayland attended, as he was a member of its Board of Trustees. At this time, President Wayland, who was a close friend of Mellen's, proposed informally to him his desire to give the Town of Wayland a gift of $500 to help the inhabitants start a town library. Jared Heard writing in 1860, after having consulted with both Mellen and Wight for his information, states that Wayland "said that he wished not only the inhabitants of the town might enjoy the advantages to be derived from such a library, but also that the towns in the vicinity of Wayland, might be induced by this example to establish for themselves similar libraries."[3] James S. Draper, who was the local historian and also

---

[1]Ditzion. p. 193.

[2]Jared M. Heard, Origins of theFree Public Library System in Massachusetts (Clinton, Massachusetts: n.p., 1860), p.4.

[3]Ibid.

personally involved with the activities to establish the library, contradicts this statement. Writing the biography of Edward Mellen for the book The Annals of Sudbury, Wayland and Maynard, authored by Hudson and published in 1891, Draper states that he was the first person to see Judge Mellen upon his return from Brown University that day. "At this interview, under the seal of privacy, he disclosed the following facts: 'Pres. Wayland had proposed to give the Town of Wayland the sum of $500, and on consulting me (Mellen) as to the form in which the gift should be made, I suggested that of a PUBLIC LIBRARY, to which the President readily acceded.'"[1] However, in the published proceedings of the town hall dedication, there is historical information included at the end. It is possible to assume that Draper, as town historian, was the author. In this earlier account, President Wayland is given credit for originating the idea of the town library.[2] This discrepancy may have occurred due to the interpretation of the words: "as to the form in which the gift should be made." It does not appear logical that a man, who had previously been active in both educational and library causes, should make a donation without a specific purpose in mind. A contemporary of his asserted that Wayland had become "distinguished by the zeal and ability he has manifested in his recent efforts to extend more widely the benefits of a collegiate education."[3] He was one of the founders of the American Institute of Instruction which had as one of its purposes, the promotion of any form of education. Over the years, Wayland had frequently spoken publicly in favor of free libraries.[4] In one of his discourses he said: "The traveller on the journey of life

---

[1]Alfred Sereno Hudson, The Annals of Sudbury, Wayland, and Hudson (Middlesex County, Massachusetts:n.p., 1891), p. 196.

[2]Town of Wayland, Dedication. p. 77.

[3]Heard. p. 12.

[4]Francis Wayland and H. L. Wayland, A Memoir of the Life and Labors of Francis Wayland D.D., L.L.D., 2 vols. (New York: Sheldon & Company, 1867), I: 318, 324.

would fain leave some memorial, which shall convince the crowd which shall come after him, that his name stood for something that was worthy of the character of man."[1] It is not unlikely that Wayland would have considered the foundation of a free library a fitting memorial for himself. In consulting Mellen, maybe Wayland was considering the alternatives of a donation to the school district libraries, to the East Sudbury Charitable Library which was available to all the townspeople, or to a free public library. In trying to determine which alternative would be the most effective and have the greatest chance of success in the Town of Wayland, Mellon, as a resident and community leader, would be more likely to be able to accurately predict this than would Francis Wayland. Or these same words may have only referred to how a gift of $500 for a town library should be presented to the town. All records agree that it was Mellen's suggestion that the gift should be made conditional upon the town raising an equal amount by subscription or otherwise and with the "whole amount of $1,000 to be devoted to the purchase of books for a town library."[2] Surely both of these men realized, as past history had shown, that outright gifts of books or money for the purchase of them to a town, when no community involvement existed, usually resulted in lack of appreciation and support. Unified collective action was necessary for success. The Citizens Committee in Boston in 1841 had said: "'For such an institution to accomplish its whole purpose, it must be in the highest sense popular. That is, it must have directly engaged in its formation and use the whole people... This institution can only exist through the enthusiasm of the people, and it can be created by that in a moment.'"[3]

---

[1] Francis Wayland, Occasional Discourses (Boston: James Loring, 1833), p. 246.

[2] Heard. p. 4.

[3] Thompson. p. 189.

The strategy suggested by Mellen of a conditional gift had by the third-quarter of the 19th century become the standard procedure with philanthropic gifts to libraries, and "this practice was later systematized by the greatest library-giver of them all - Andrew Carnegie."[1] Mellen added another condition to the gift to serve as an incentive to prompt action. Wayland citizens would have to take an active part by matching the gift, and they would have to do it in one month's time.

As to the reasons why President Wayland chose the Town of Wayland as the recipient of his gift, they must remain at least partially a matter of speculation. Historical evidence is incomplete as to why the name "Wayland" was chosen for the town when the name was changed from East Sudbury in 1835. Local historian Helen Emery contends that, while the reason for the naming of the town may forever remain a mystery, it is probable that it was named after Francis Wayland, due to the influence of Mellen who knew him. However, all public statements made at the time of the name change, which have been found, make no reference whatsoever to Francis Wayland. Nor was there any official communication between the town and Wayland in 1835. If the town as a body chose the name to honor the man, it is reasonable to assume that it would have notified him of this. Thus, the gift was probably not out of gratitude for an honor previously bestowed by the town; but "simply that by this time Francis Wayland having begun his custom of making frequent summer visits to Wayland, liked the place and his friends there, and was spurred to even greater liking by the fact that his name and that of the town were the same."[2] His friendships with Mellen and Wight, graduates of Brown University, were influencing factors. These men had already demonstrated their interest and concern in the local library movement and were prominent citizens of the town. Therefore, they guaranteed the strong local leadership necessary to spur to action the local citizens. Also, through his friends and his summer

---

[1] Ditzion. p. 141.

[2] Helen F. Emery, "The Town Which Bears His Name." (Lecture delivered to the Wayland Historical Society, February 7, 1957), p.28.

visits, the donor would have become familiar with the general character of the Town of Wayland. He was probably impressed with the town's use of its charitable library and agreed with the assessment of Wight who said:

> I found them to be a remarkably intelligent people. There was a large proportion of men and women of good common-sense; and some of superior mental endowments... They were deeply interested in the prosperity of their common schools... It seemed to be the general desire and aim of the people to give their children the best education their limited means would allow. In some instances, two contiguous districts united, in order to prolong the term of instruction. There was much solicitude among leading men to procure competent teachers.[1]

The New England economy and Francis Wayland's belief that it was financially possible for every town to support a library might also have influenced his choice. In New England at this time, wealth was still in the hands of a few, and the general income level was relatively low, although a class of men of fairly modest means was just beginning to develop. In the smaller, less wealthy communities support from the town treasury for the library could only be meager and had to be supplemented by private gifts. Even spreading the tax burden over the whole community was not enough.[2] Had the donation been made to a wealthier municipality, it would not then have been able to serve as an example to all other communities in the state. Many towns would still have been able to claim economic inability to support a library. The donor himself could serve as an example of what a man of relatively modest means could accomplish through limited philanthropy. For the President of Brown University the sum of $500 was considerable, as his annual salary amounted to little more than $1,500.[3] However, the formation of libraries did not require phenomenal wealth. Wayland could prove to his own economic class that philanthropy need not be only in the domain of the very wealthy. Francis Wayland and the Town of Wayland could be, and in fact did become, perfect examples of a

---

[1] Wight, "Reminisances". pp. 10-11.

[2] Shera. pp. 200-202.

[3] Emery. p. 27.

financial method, and probably the only one, that would successfully work in the establishment of town libraries.

Later, with this proven successful method in mind, Wight in formulating the Massachusetts Library Law would include the provision that would limit the amount that a town could tax its residents. In explaining the law, he said: "It guards against any lavish and unnecessary expenditures which might otherwise be incurred in a time of excitement,"[1] and it left room for the exercise of private generosity.

Wight and Wayland could feel confident that philanthropic gifts would be forthcoming. In New England in an increasing atmosphere of social responsibility, "men of means, but one or at most two generations removed from the economic status of the ordinary folks who were their neighbors, were acquiring the habit of sharing their good fortune with the community."[2] Wight said that it could be justly expected that the psychology of the generous native son would be effective in bringing about private contributions to libraries. He specifically mentioned donations and bequests in the law, in the hopes that this would serve as an encouragement to people to be generous in this way.[3]

Lastly, the size ot the Town of Wayland may have affected the choice. Boston had unsuccessfully been attempting to establish a public library for a number of years; and in Providence, the city of Wayland's residence, the discussion of a public library had been on-going for about twenty years. According to a Providence paper when reporting on the imminent opening of the Public Library in 1878, "'It appeared that the voters at large wished to wait until a library could be started through philanthrop

---

[1]Fowle. p. 259.

[2]Ditzion. pp. 140-141.

[3]Fowle. p. 259.

and decisively voted down a measure which would tax the populace!"[1] Possibly, Wayland saw in the small town with its town meeting form of government, less bureaucracy and a better chance of gaining popular support and positive action, than would be possible in a city, such as his own of Providence.

No matter how bright the prospects of establishing a town library in Wayland may have seemed, it is apparent that Wayland and Mellen did not anticipate immediate overwhelming support. Rather than simply and directly submitting the proposal to the town meeting, and indirect procedure was used, which was obviously an attempt to overcome possible apathy and resistance and to develop the support necessary to win the townspeople's acceptance. Draper's statement that he was told of Wayland's offer under the seal of secrecy indicates that Wayland and/or Mellen had made a deliberate decision not to reveal to the general public who the donor was. At the start, less than a handful of people knew his identity. Perhaps they felt that the way in which the Wayland citizens perceived the President of Brown University might make some of them unwilling to support his proposal for a town library. He was only a visitor and not one of the real townspeople. He was an intellectual and an educational innovator, which to some might mean experimenter. If the library was perceived as an experiment of a non-resident, educational innovator, would it be likely to receive the financial support of the local citizens? It might also have been judged, that by stating that it was a gift of a "Friend of Wayland", people might assume the donor was a fellow townsman and contribute more readily. Although the offer was made to Mellen in the summer of 1847, nothing official occurred until the town meeting of November 8 of that year. At that time when Article 7 on the warrant, which read: "To hear any report of any committee of the town, that may be ready to report and act thereon at the pleasure of the meeting,"[2] the town clerk in his original

---

[1] Ditzion. p. 46

[2] Wayland Town Records, November 8, 1847. (Town [illegible], Wayland, Massachusetts).

notes he took at the meeting wrote the following between Articles 7 and 8: "Mr. Mellen's proposition, chose a committee as follows..."[1] In the formal town report it reads: "...a committee was chosen to confer with him (Mellen) on the subject of a room for a library..."[2] It is of significance that the warrant contained no article relative to the library, and that no committee for the library existed at that time. Yet, Mellen was able to introduce the subject upon the floor of town meeting and have it acted upon. In so doing, he was breaking the long-standing tradition of any New England town meeting of only acting upon those things listed in the warrant. Mellen might justifiably have been ruled out of order; but he was not. Mellen had been active during the preceding few months for "at the time of this meeting it was very generally understood in the town, that a donation of $500 had been offered, but the name of Dr. Wayland had not been connected with it."[3] At that time the town had not, at least officially, been informed that the gift was conditional upon matching funds, or that the gift and the matching funds were to be used exclusively for the purchase of books. So in 1847 when the town voted to establish a committee, they were not yet aware that a financial commitment by the town was going to be necessary. Almost three years would pass, twelve town meetings would be held where the proposed library would be acted upon, and eight different committees would be created before the Wayland Town Library would open its doors to serve the community.

A public meeting of the citizens, but not an official town meeting, was held on January 17, 1848, at which time Mellen submitted the

---

[1]Wayland Town Clerk, original notes from November 8, 1847 Wayland Town Meeting found in the Wayland Historical Society.

[2]Wayland Town Records, November 8, 1847.

[3]Heard. p. 5.

proposal in writing, still referring to the donor as a "Friend of Wayland." How many or which townspeople attended is unknown, but those present supported the idea; for James S. Draper was appointed as agent to canvass the town to obtain the necessary subscriptions to match the gift of $500. Mellen's written statement, which was undoubtedly read aloud, was much more than a rendering of the facts related to the gift. It was an emotional appeal aimed at hitting the heart of local pride. He cited the "charitable and philanthropic institutions, more than any one thing, that make each of us, when beyond her limits, feel a rising of the heart at the mention of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts."[1] He described the founding of this library, which would cost so little to educate all of the people and which would serve as an example to surrounding towns, as a "golden opportunity... fraught with consequences so momentous, so far-reaching it would bless all generations to come... Look at our population and the sum that each must contribute, to raise the sum proposed, and I will not permit myself to doubt whether the sum will be realized."[2]

Appeal to pride worked. Within the stipulated time of one month, 208 persons responded to the call; and a total of $553.90 was pledged and almost entirely paid. Draper showed wisdom in obtaining pledges for more than the required amount. Although most documents state that the entire amount pledged was paid within the month, this was a slight exaggeration. In fact, the statement made at the town meeting that the gift had been matched and that Mellen had in his possession more than $1,000 as a gift to the town necessitated a small white lie to the tune of 48¢. The first treasurer's book of the Wayland Library records a total of $499.52 received of

---

[1]Edward Mellen, "Letter to the Citizens of Wayland, January 17, 1848." Found in the "Wayland Town Library Scrapbook" at the Wayland Town Library.

[2]Ibid.

subscriptions as of February 10, 1848. Later, more subscriptions were paid in, leaving $11.63 that had been pledged but that was never collected.[1] However, that percentage of collection on pledged monies must be considered remarkable by any day's standards. Only four individuals, Edward Mellen, Deacon James Draper, James S. Draper, and William Heard gave from $20 to $25. One entire family contributed $17, one individual gave $12, four individuals gave $10, and all the rest of the donations were between 25¢ and $10. In a town whose economy was based upon farming and small shops and which had a total population of about only 1,100, this represented extensive community involvement.[2]

Judge Mellen's appeal to pride would be duplicated time and again in the public library movement. It would be directed at all levels from local to national. A cultural nationalism had developed in America by this time, and it was strongest in New England. A desire had developed to impress Europe with American cultural achievements, and surpassing European libraries was one way to do this. New England had a colonial heritage as an intellectual and cultural center. Now, when ground was being lost to other regions of the country in the areas of industry and commerce, she was "eager to achieve national distinction as a guardian of the cultural heritage and as a patron of libraries."[3] This was one area where New England could satisfy the desire for regional prestige. The creation of the Astor free reference library in New York was a threat to New England supremacy. The editor of the Boston Daily Courier wrote in 1853 that it was evident "that the people of the city will not allow themselves to be outstripped by any other in a care for the nobler objects of human pursuit."[4] After a number of libraries were established, local

---

[1] "Wayland Town Library Treasurer's Record Book," 1848, (Wayland Town Library).

[2] "Wayland Town Library Donations Book," 1878 (Wayland Town Library)

[3] Shera. p. 214.; Ditzion. pp. 20, 57-58.

[4] Shera. pp. 214-215.

pride and an appeal to keep up with or out-do ones neighbors was used as a goad in towns where no libraries yet existed. An appeal to pride could definitely influence popular sentiment.[1]

The warrant for the March 6, 1848 town meeting contained four articles related to the library. The first was "To hear from any individual any communication, proposition or statement respecting a Town Library and do or act in any way relative thereto or to any subject therewith."[2] Mellen now officially revealed to the town the offer of a "Friend of Wayland." He stated that he had in his possession the $500 gift and more than equal that amount raised by subscription. The town voted that Mellen be requested to reveal the donor's name, which he did. It was then "voted unanimously (by rising with uncovered heads) that the thanks of the town be presented to the Rev. Dr. Wayland for his generous donation."[3] Under the next article the town formally voted to accept the monies. In the last two library articles, "To see if the town will provide a suitable room or building in which said Library may be kept" and to choose a committee for the purchase of books and to formulate library by-laws or regulations; the town referred the matter to a committee which they appointed.[4] Mellen on "presenting the whole matter to a crowded hall of his fellow citizens... found them ready with one voice to accept and adopt it."[5] Thus on this date, the Wayland Town Library was actually founded.

A problem immediately arose because of Massachusetts' doctrine of state's pre-eminence. The committee, chaired by Mellen, was convinced that

---

[1] Ditzion. p. 71.

[2] Wayland Town Records, March 6, 1848.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Hudson. p. 197.

a municipality had no legal right to tax its inhabitants for anything pertaining to a public library. In order to overcome this difficulty, the committee submitted a proposal which was accepted at the May 1848 Town Meeting. To raise the money specifically for a building for the library, the sum of $500 would be apportioned among all the taxpayers of the town according to their taxable estates. This would be collected as a tax separate from their normal assessment and the money would be set aside to be appropriated to erect and furnish a building for the library. Payment of this specific library tax would be optional. At the same town meeting in disposition of another article on the warrant which read: "to do or act in any way relative to any matter concerning the library, not included in the above articles.", the town voted to abate the tax set against seven specifically named taxpayers.[1] It can not be assumed that this small number of individuals who chose not to pay the optional tax and who were willing to express their opposition publicly, indicated the approval of the majority of the townspeople to support their own library. It is not known how many other citizens did not make the payment when it actually became due.

Despite the existence of at least some resistance, the town voted to adopt a code of by-laws that the committee had drawn up and also chose another committee to now expend $500 of the donation-subscription money on the purchase of books. Another committee was picked to handle the erection of a building if a sufficient amount could be collected via the optional tax.[2]

The town's action on this date earned it the official designation as the second free public library in the United States. Peterborough,

---

[1]Wayland Town Records, May 8, 1848.

[2]Ibid.

New Hampshire was the first. However, it should be noted that, while the Town of Peterborough starting in 1833 appropriated money from the town treasury to support the town library, the citizens did not tax themselves. Money which they appropriated was received by the towns of New Hampshire from the state with the stipulation that it be expended for educational purposes.[1] Thus, Wayland citizens had not just duplicated Peterborough's action; but they had taken an additional step of major significance.

The next town meeting at which the library would come up did not occur for eight months; and the only article relating to the library said: "To see if the town would have their committee proceed to purchase books for the Wayland Library, under the present circumstances, and to see if the town will take any measures to provide;a place for said library to be kept."[2] Despite prior authorization, the committee had not yet purchased books and now wondered if they should proceed. Obviously the $500 deemed necessary to erect a building had not been raised through taxation. At this meeting, the proposal of an individual citizen, Luther Gleason, to erect a suitable building for a library which he would then lease to the town, was made known. This must have created a sense of optimism for a committee was chosen to meet with Gleason, and the town directed its Library Committee to begin purchasing books. At a continuation of this meeting one week later, the building committee was given authorization to commit the town to a fifteen year lease with Gleason.[3] Deacon James Draper made an offer to "pay the town of Wayland the sum of $30 annually for two years from the

---

[1] Albert Smith, History of Peterborough, New Hampshire (Boston: Press of Geo. H. Ellis Company, 1876), pp. 114-119.

[2] Wayland Town Records, January 1, 1849.

[3] Wayland Town Records, January 1 & 8, 1849.

time at which the library building proposed to be erected by Mr. Luther Gleason shall be accepted and used by the town for the Wayland Library, which sum shall be appropriated to defray the expense of the lease of said building."[1] Immediately following this, Ellis Bramhall guaranteed "to pay the town $5 a year, for five years, towards paying the rent of the Library building, to commence on the third year after the acceptance of the building." Additionally, he would give 25 books to the town, providing the library building was built; but he said he would not "if the library business acted on this day, is reconsidered after this date."[2] At this point it seems that the few strong supporters of the library found it necessary to guarantee at least two years of full, and five years of partial support[3] for housing the library, in order to win over the reluctant taxpayers.

Mr. Luther did erect a building, but the Library Committee judged it unacceptable for the purpose of a library when it was completed and would not accept it. Although this fact had not officially been reported to the town as of April of 1849, popular support of the library effort was diminishing, and the town voted to have the tax collector return the money from the optional tax to all from whom it had been collected. It was not until nine months later, that the town meeting appointed a new committee "with full Power to...procure some suitable place for the library before March meeting."[4] This committee, it must be remembered, had no funds to work with; and sensing the mood

---

[1]Deacon James Draper, Handwritten Note, January 8, 1849 (Wayland Historical Society).

[2]Wayland Town Records, January 8, 1849.

[3]A later town record entry establishes that $30 per year was the amount for which the proposed building could be leased from Mr. Gleason.

[4]Wayland Town Records, April 12, 1849 and January 21, 1850.

of the voters came up with what must have been a necessary but disappointing compromise. They recommended that the lower rooms in the Town Hall be repaired and altered for library use. Finally on March 4, 1850, the town was willing to make a financial commitment to this extent; and it gave a committee the power to borrow money on town credit for this purpose.[1]

The Wayland library, like so many others, would not be housed in its own separate building until someone's philanthropic gift would make this possible without a large town expenditure. This occurred in 1896 when Dr. Warren Roby of Wayland gave $10,000 and a gift of land to the library for this purpose. His generosity and interest in the library may have been increased due to the fact that he was a descendant of a member of the Board of Trustees of the early East Sudbury Social Library. In 1850 the library opened with only two small rooms in the Town Hall. They probably were inadequate in size from the start, as within one year additional space was needed. Then another Town Hall room, which had been used in the past as a school room, was fixed up and used for the library.

From its beginning on August 7, 1850, the library had the administrative pattern of a social library. Like most public libraries to follow, it was governed by a board of trustees or library committee elected by the citizens of the town. Its responsibilities included the selection and purchase of books, selection of the librarian, functioning as a board of appeal in cases involving lost or damaged books, and in general to supervise and control the library.[2] It was almost two years before the town actually entrusted to the trustees the full power authorized them by the town adopted by-laws. Prior to this, every minor change in policy or

---

[1] Wayland Town Records, March 4, 1850.

[2] "Wayland Town Library Record Book", 1850, (Wayland Town Library)

procedure, such as changing closing time to one hour earlier during the winter months, was voted upon by Town Meeting. However, undoubtedly as a realistic and practical measure, the town voted in 1852 to "authorize the Library Committee to make any other alterations in the laws of the same, they shall see fit."[1]

Wayland's first library officers consisted of Judge Edward Mellen; farmer and active leader in local and state affairs, William R. Dudley; farmer and Justice of the Peace, Sylvester Reeves, Jr; and James S. Draper who in his lifetime was a teacher, surveyor, farmer, and on the Board of Directors of the Central Massachusetts R. R. Company. All were from prominent town families, held numerous town offices, were members of the Unitarian Church, and lived in quite substantial homes. Their elevated social position in the community is attested to by the inclusion of the biographies of three of the four in Hudson's Annals of Sudbury, Wayland, & Maynard. Only 29 of Wayland's citizens earned this distinction. Their respective ages were 48, 43, 27, & 39.[2]

The elitist nature of early library sponsors carried over to the Board of Trustees of the libraries after they were established. Wayland's Trustees fit the description given by library historian Harris as "generally male, 'past his prime', white, Protestant, well educated, wealthy, a member of the social elite, and usually a member of a profession or a business executive.'[3] Historian Harris contends that this situation created an obstacle to one of the main stated purposes of the public library - that of serving the common man.

---

[1]Wayland Town Records, April 3, 1852.

[2]Hudson. pp. 186-189, 196-197.

[3]Harris. p. 2511.

He believed that those who were not of the masses themselves were, therefore, incapable of understanding and serving the common people.[1]

Henry Wight was appointed as the first librarian. According to the by-laws, he had no policy-making powers; and his sole function was to tend to the care and delivery of books.[2] It is not surprising that Henry Wight had not been involved in any way in the establishment of the library and that his name does not appear in any town records until he was selected as librarian.

Having expended half of the donations, the library opened with about 586 volumes and was soon augmented by the vote of the town to move the school district libraries to the town library. And just as Wight and Ticknor had predicted would happen in many cases, the two social libraries in the town donated their collections to the town library. Donations of social libraries, in fact, created the foundation of a public library in many towns.[3] The content of the Wayland Library was widely varied, including books of history, poetry, Shakespeare, religion, nature, education, science, useful and domestic arts, classics, juvenile literature, and periodicals. Current popular novels included Jane Eyre, Moby Dick, and The Scarlet Letter.[4] This list reveals that the library followed the policy of providing at least to some extent what appealed to popular reading tastes. While the policy of having the library accomodate itself to the public convenience was not verbalized until a few years later by Ticknor of Boston, Wayland, within the limits of its financial resources, appeared to be practicing a similar policy. The

---

[1] Ibid.

[2] "Wayland Town Library Record Book", 1850, n.p.

[3] Shera. p. 198.

[4] Town of Wayland, Wayland Town Library Catalogue of Books, 1850 (n.p., 1850), passim.

library was open only on Saturdays. It is unknown whether the choice of Saturday was based upon the librarian's availability or the convenience of the public. The job of librarian was part-time and paid an annual salary of only $100. However, the library was open for two hours in both the afternoon and in the evening. The by-laws specified that it would be "in the central part of the central village of Wayland," and thus be in the most convenient place for the greatest number of citizens. Intended for adolescents and adults, any citizen over the age of 14 could withdraw one book at a time for a period of four weeks, as long as no one family had more than three volumes at the same time. Fines and penalties were set for overdue, damaged or lost books.[1]

Waylanders used and appreciated their library once it was in operation. It was written at the time that

> On Saturday afternoon ladies, and young ladies, and girls, frequent it, and have a good time of friendly greetings and pleasant intercourse. In the evening men, young men, and boys may be found there, spending an hour or two in a rational and useful manner, under the quiet influence and suggestive association of the place. All carry away with them instructive and interesting books adapted to their peculiar capacities, tastes and wants and furnishing them with innocent and improving occupation in their leisure hours... Nearly one-third of the whole number [books] are constantly out, going into almost every family.[2]

The extent of their appreciation of their library was shown when the town unanimously voted to invite, at the town's expense, their benefactor, Francis Wayland to come to speak at a special library Celebration on August 26, 1851. It was a gala occasion beginning with a procession from the train depot, where Wayland was met and escorted to the library, and then on to the Unitarian Church. The town had turned out en masse and filled the church to overflowing. A Welcome Address was given by Mellen in which the town's gratitude was expressed.[3] Dr. Wayland upon observing

---

[1] "Wayland Town Library Record Book", 1850.

[2] Fowle. p. 263.

[3] Horace Heard, "Order and Arrangement of Exercises of the Day" found in "Wayland Town Library Scrapbook," August 26, 1851 (Handwritten memorandum).; Town of Wayland Records, April 7, 1851.

the crowd, said to Judge Mellen:

> This gives me a higher idea of the New England character than anything I have before witnessed. Your inhabitants have assembled without distinction of age or sex, to celebrate, with joyful festivities, not any great victory, nor any great political event, but the founding of a library.[1]

Then as guest speaker, Wayland said: "Our fathers founded schools where we are taught to read; when we know how to read we want something to read, we want books."[2] Music was supplied by talented citizens, and a collation took place in Bullard's Grove, where tables had been spread for the repast. It was here that the Hon. Horace Mann, Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, spoke on "the importance of Free Public Libraries, inaugurated in Massachusetts by the initial example of Wayland."[3]

As had been expected from the onset, numerous individuals and corporations made contributions of money or books to the Wayland Library, which expanded the collection. By 1878, 136 individuals had donated 1445 volumes and 16 societies or corporations had given another 477 volumes. At that time, the library had a total of 5743 volumes.[4] The money for additional purchases was to come from fines collected or rental charges for the use of the library room for lectures, etc. The original by-laws made no mention of town appropriations for book purchases. Under the by-laws accepted by the town in 1848, "the expense of the requisite furnishing and repairing of the Library-room and building, or warming and lighting the same, the the cost of the labels, catalogue, and record-books, and the salary of the Librarian shall be paid by the town."[5]

---

[1] Heard. p. 14.

[2] Ibid. p. 15

[3] James S. Draper, "Wayland Town Library Scrapbook", p. 10.

[4] "Wayland Town Library Donations Book", 1878 (Wayland Town Library)

[5] "Wayland Town Library Record Book," 1850.

The citizens of Wayland had voted to tax themselves to maintain their library, but the legality of this was still questionable. However, despite the doctrine of the state's pre-eminence, it had never been uncommon in New England for a town to act on its own volition and assume whatever authority it considered necessary or desirable. This was just what the Town of Wayland was doing by general consent.

In 1850 one or a few Wayland residents suggested to a member of the Massachusetts Legislature that permissive legislation of towns to tax their inhabitants for library purposes be passed; but nothing came of it at that time.[1] In 1851 John Burt Wight, Wayland's representative to the Massachusetts Legislature drew up, introduced, elegantly argued for, and successfully brought about the passage of the Public Library Act. New Hampshire had enacted similar legislation two years before; but it was not this example but rather the difficulties encountered by the Town of Wayland because of its lack of legal authority to tax for the library which motivated Wight's actions. The problems Wayland had "in preparing a place for her library, and in keeping it in operation; and which would have presented themselves in making desirable additions to it after the $1000 given for that purpose should be expended,"[2] led to the passage of this law.

This law, Wight said: "was not merely to prevent the necessity of special legislation in particular instances, but also and chiefly to suggest, recommend, and facilitate the formation of a good, permanent, increasing Library in every city and town of the Commonwealth..."[3] This was the beginning of Wight's personal campaign to bring about

---

[1] Heard. p. 9.
[2] Heard. p. 9.; Shera. p. 189.
[3] Wight, Circular. p. 1.

universal adoption of the Free Public Library. By its provisions, the law allowed municipalities to establish, maintain, and increase public libraries and to provide suitable rooms for such either by bequests and donations or by taxing its inhabitants. To found a library a town might appropriate "a sum not exceeding $1 for each of its ratable polls...[and] annually might appropriate a sum not exceeding 25¢ for each of its ratable polls."[1] In 1859 the annual sum was increased to 50¢, and in 1866 the rate of permissible tax was eliminated, as experience proved that only the larger towns were able to adequately support libraries at the early rate.[2] The provisions of this law would allow libraries to be permanent and increasing. It is quite probable that even in Wayland, without this legal authority, the local library supporters may have run into difficulty obtaining appropriations for the purchase of additional books. It was not until 1853 that the first town appropriation, amounting to $75 was made for this purpose.[3]

Wight's 200 word preamble was omitted in the final version of the bill. It had clearly stated the purpose of the Free Public Library as being the universal diffusion of knowlege which should be provided beyond the public school in order to preserve freedom, equalize social advantage, bring about industrial success and the over-all betterment of man. The public library would be the most effective, convenient, and economic method to accomplish all these things.[4] At a third reading of the bill in the House, Wight made extensive remarks for its support. Libraries, he claimed, were

---

[1]Ibid. p. 3.

[2]Ditzion. p. 131.

[3]Wayland Town Records, April 4, 1853

[4]Ditzion. pp. 18-19.

a needed supplement to the common school, which was not perfect; so that "every one will have it in his power to supply the deficiencies of his early acquisitions."[1] The social library was inadequate, because it did not meet the needs of all the people, being available only to the wealthier individuals. The public library would help to improve men of all occupations; and Wight argued that "even in the most simple and uniform operations of labor, it has been found that other things being equal, more is accomplished, and the work better done, by intelligent and well-informed persons, than by those who are ignorant and in a low mental condition."[2] In addition to causing industrial prosperity, the library would result in "intelligent, well-informed, useful and respectable citizens, and... correct, improve, and elevate the general character of the whole community."[3] He cited other practical aspects such as the depository function, the encouragement of authors, favoring all moral reforms, and the improvement of all current methods of instruction. Lastly, he noted the present successful operation of the Wayland Library; but he also cited the town's difficulties due to lack of authority to tax. Wight pointed out that the law was permissive. "It does not <u>require</u> the citizens of Towns to act on the subject, but only gives the necessary authority, whenever the inhabitants shall have become desirous so to do by a suitable consideration of its utility and importance."[4]

Wight's bill met with little resistance in the Legislature. Initially he introduced the idea to the House Judiciary Committee, whose chairman was in sympathy and "expressed great pleasure that one movement was desired in the Legislature which had not for its object, a selfish

---

[1] Fowle. p. 260.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid. p. 261.

[4] Ibid. p. 259.

end or personal aggrandizement... and [Wight] was allowed by the House, the honor of reporting it, without reference to a committee."[1] It was passed after only twelve days with just a few minor alterations. The most important change was regarding Wight's attempt to secure state aid for libraries. Section Four read: "Any city or town which shall have established such a library shall be entitled to receive from the school fund, or other proceeds of the public lands not appropriated, 20% on any sum within the last named limit, which it may in any year expend for the augmentation of the same,"[2] was omitted. Massachusetts was not yet ready for state aid to town libraries; but the seed Wight planted would germinate within a short time. Wight would continue to push for this provision; and at the Library Celebration in Wayland in 1851, he said in his speech, suggesting an alternative approach for state aid:

> May not the legislature at any session by a small grant in aid for the annual increase of such libraries wherever they exist, a grant much less than that which is now annually made in aid of the common schools, ensure the formation, increase and perpetuation of such libraries in all cities and towns within a very few years.[3]

The Bill required little deliberation, and as Wight stated:

> Everyone to whom it was mentioned approved it and welcomed it as a measure of more than ordinary importance. At the passage of the bill... several of the prominent members [of the General Court] came forward and strongly expressed their satisfaction and congratulations at its nearly unanimous adoption and manifest certainty of its being enacted.[4]

The members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education, thinking that Wight's remarks "might be useful in bringing the subject more distinctly and fully before the public mind,"[5] requested that they be published in

---

[1]Heard. p. 10

[2]Shera. pp. 192-193.

[3]John Burt Wight, "Speech of the Rev. John Burt Wight at Library Celebration, August 26, 1851, Wayland, Massachusetts." (Wayland Historical Society)

[4]Wight, "Lecture on Public Libraries". n.p.

[5]Fowle. p. 257.

the Common School Journal. This journal cheerfully complied, because they considered "the want of public libraries to be a serious defect in... [the] system of public instruction." The editor wrote: "We shall take an early opportunity to enforce the valuable truths entertained in the following address, whose careful and considered perusal we recommend to our Boards of Education, School Committees, teachers, and to all thoughtful citizens."[1] Wight's address was "an important early attempt to formulate and codify public library objectives... and the passage of the Act in substantially the form in which it had been introduced, gave to its chief sponsor the opportunity for library promotion that he had been seeking."[2]

In 1853 Wight wrote a circular, the printing of which was paid for by the donations of eight gentlemen of Boston, and of which 4,000 copies were mailed[3] omitting the prepayment of postage. Wight noted at the end that he believed the importance of the subject would be sufficient apology for this action. In the circular he referred to the law, as well as including a copy of it. He mentioned Wayland's successful library, now two years old, and the recently established ones at Concord and Southboro, the first coming into being with the assistance of the donation of all the books from the existing social library, and the latter by a gift of money from a private individual. He then named five other towns, including Boston, in which libraries had been or were in the process of being formed. The object of the circular was to bring to the attention of all the people the numerous advantages of the public library. Wight then set forth his arguments as he had before the

---

[1]Fowle. p. 257-258.

[2]Shera. pp. 194, 197.

[3]John Burt Wight, Memorandum, January 1, 1853, (Wayland Historical Society, Wayland, Massachusetts.)

Legislature. He also argued the economic practicality of establishing a library by pointing out that even without the benefit of a benefactor, which was unlikely,

> a sum raised once, equal to that raised annually for the support of schools, would be sufficient, even in the less populous towns, to found a library, very respectable and useful in its commencement... The universal establishment of such libraries in this Commonwealth - and may I not say in the New England States, in the United States, and throughout the civilized world - is a question only of time, and this question of time is to us of the present day an important question.[1]

He concluded by requesting that all necessary actions be taken and influence be used wherever possible to bring about as soon as possible the formation of libraries in every city and town.

This circular was sent by Wight within the State of Massachusetts to all government officials, mayors, selectmen, school committee members, editors of newspapers and periodicals, and many clergymen and doctors. Throughout the nation he sent it to educators, Presidents of colleges, and to local school boards.[2] The extent of the influence of this circular can never be known, but it was widespread, as illustrated by the fact that the Superintendent of Public Education in Madison, Wisconsin wrote to Wight in 1859, requesting information and advice when that state was establishing town school libraries.[3]

Historian Johnson contends that "it was the passage of state laws enabling the local governmental units to levy taxes for the support of public libraries that really began the modern public library movement."[4] However, as was demonstrated in earlier library history, as with the school district libraries, legislation alone, without strong leadership,

---

[1]Wight, Circular. pp 1-3.

[2]Wight, Memorandum, January 1, 1853

[3]John Burt Wight to Superintendent of Public Education, Madison, Wisconsin, April 27, 1859, (Wayland Historical Society, Wayland, Massachusetts

[4]Johnson. p. 319.

was not enough. New Hampshire had passed a law in 1849, but "the record does not indicate that the law had marked influence in the immediate encouragement of public library formation."[1] The reverse was true in Massachusetts. Wight was optimistic that the law "would become an effective agent of promotion."[2] However, it was his leadership and that of the founders of the Boston Public Library in 1854 that became the agents of promotion, more than the law itself. By 1854, at least ten public libraries had opened in Massachusetts; and the opening of the Boston Public Library was an added impetus to the library movement throughout the nation. "Boston was the universal arbiter of social and intellectual matters in the nation, what she did in the area of intellectual affairs was sure to find imitators throughout the land."[3] By her size, economic and social force in the mid-1800's, as well as being the first American city to establish a free public library, Boston was able to give the library movement the recognition and prestige which provided the necessary stimulus for its expansion. Expansion came after "two centuries of experimentation, uncertainty and change."[4]

In New England, particularly in Massachusetts, the transition after 1851 from social libraries to public tax supported libraries was rapid and met with little voter opposition. This transition occurred quickly and smoothly in the many towns that had wealth enough so the town treasuries could easily afford them and where public opinion was favorable to tax support for agencies of public education. Some delays of establishment were caused by human inertia, the time consuming process of group activity and cooperative action, the prior existence of a semi-public organization serving as an excuse not to establish a public

---

[1]Shera. p. 188.

[2]Wight, "Lecture on Public Libraries".

[3]Harris. p. 2510.

[4]Shera. pp. 170, 157.

library, or financial inability to support one.[1] In considering the reluctance or resistance of some Wayland citizens, it appears understandable and justified. It must be noted that not only were they being asked to do something which had no precedent, and no legal basis in their state; but also, they already had the East Sudbury Charitable Library which was free to all townspeople. Additionally, Wayland was not a wealthy town, but rather small farming community. Only the strong leadership of Mellen and a few others was able to overcome the reluctance of the average Wayland citizen, but even this reluctance was typical of the library movement. Historian Johnson could have been describing the library situation in the Town of Wayland when he said:

> Generally speaking the development of a useful library is more often than not the result of the labors of one man, or a few men, in performing a task that is little appreciated by the majority of their contemporaries. Great popular demand for libraries is almost conspicuous by its absence; great popular support is also usually lacking. Most of the great libraries of the Western World have behind them a history of long neglect with a constant struggle for funds, for quarters, and for staff. Only in the last century or so have they been generally supported, used and appreciated.[2]

The Town of Wayland stood at the very turning point of library history. "There were not many among the New England populace who were aware that the old order was about to surrender to the new, but it was apparent to an obscure minister in a small Massachusetts community."[3] The far-sightedness and vision of Rev. Wight would be proven within just 25 years. New England had, as a librarian of that age said, "'a peculiar combination of great industrial and commercial activity, social unrest and progressivisms, political idealism and intellectual hunger, which make the New England character..., [which] furnished the best

---

[1] Ditzion. pp. 37-44.

[2] Johnson. p. 406

[3] Shera. p. 198.

possible conditions for the growth of the public library idea.'"[1]

In Massachusetts the idea had truly caught on and its example had been copied elsewhere. It was reported in 1876 at the nation's first conference of librarians that

> by the latest statistics of the Bureau of Education, it appears that they are 188 public libraries in 11 of the United States. Eight of these States have passed public-library statutes within the past ten years. In the number of libraries the States rank as follows: Massachusetts, 127; Illinois, 14; New Hampshire, 13; Ohio, 9; Maine, 8; Vermont, Connecticut and Wisconsin, 4 each; Indiana, 3; Iowa and Texas, 1 each... The aggregate number of volumes in these libraries is 1,300,000 and their annual aggregate circulation is 4,735,000 volumes.[2]

In this same year, the first issue of the Library Journal was published; the American Library Association was formed; the U. S. government issued their first "Report on Libraries"; and the Dewey Decimal system got a trial presentation.[3] After 200 years of evolution, the Wayland Town Library had made a major step in that process - tax support, which then guaranteed the essential elements of permanence and stability. This step allowed the modern public library to become a firmly established institution within the next twenty-five years. The Rev. Dr. Wayland wrote to Edward Mellen in 1851, saying: "I thank you abundantly for the interest which you and your fellow-citizens have taken in this effort. I was going to say little effort, but it is now by no means little if by example it should be permitted to spread and cover the soil of New England so that every man amongst us should have an abundant supply of intellectual food."[4] Through the efforts of Wight in his labors for the

---

[1] Ditzion. p. 173.

[2] Jacob S. Epstein, "History of the Urban Main Library Service." Library Trends 20 (April 1972): 602.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Francis Wayland to Edward Mellen, March, 1851.

cause, the example of the Town of Wayland had been spread throughout New England. A number of documents and records relating to the founding of other town libraries make mention of the establishment of the Wayland Town Library, such as the address made at the dedication of the Bristol, Rhode Island Library. Here it was said: "' We remember... that this beneficent and far-reaching legislation which has not only done so much to diffuse the benefits of the free public library, but has done so much also to awaken a popular interest in the movement, was due to the persistent labors of Rev. J. B. Wight...'"[1]

And from New England and by its example, the idea of the modern public library was spread across the nation. America was to "develop from a frontier nation of a few books to the single most library-minded nation in the world. By 1900 the U. S. had the most libraries, the largest libraries - with a few exceptions - and certainly the most-used libraries in the world."[2]

---

[1]Wayland Town Library Committee, "Annual Report of the Library Committee, 1878", found in the "Wayland Town Library Scrapbook".

[2]Johnson. p. 405.

Wight, John Burt, Rev. "Reminisances of John B. Wight 1866." Found in Salter, W. M., comp. Sermons Preached in and About Wayland. Boston: T. & J. Fleet, 1876, pp. 10-31.

Periodicals:

Epstein, Jacob S. "A History of Urban Main Library Service." Library Trends 20 (April 1972): 598-624.

Fowle, William B., ed. "Our Common School System, No. XV; Public Libraries." The Common School Journal (September 1851): 257-264.

Harris, Michael. "The Purpose of the American Public Library, A Revisionist Interpretation of History." Library Journal (September 15, 1973): 2509-2514.

Kilpela, Raymond. "The Present Status of the School District Libraries." School Libraries 18 (Summer 1969): 9-11.

Russel, Howard S. "The Publick Library: Work of Absolute Necessity." Wayland Town Crier (n.d.): n.p. (Clipping found at Wayland Historical Society.

Unpublished Reports:

Emery, Helen Fitch. "The Town Which Bears His Name." Paper presented to the Wayland Historical Society, February 7, 1957. (Typewritten).

Primary Sources

Wayland, Massachusetts. Wayland Historical Society. Deacon James Draper Papers, Judge Edward Mellen Papers, Rev. John Burt Wight Papers, and Wayland Town Library Papers.

Wayland, Massachusetts. Wayland Town Library.
"East Sudbury Social Library Record Book,"1796.
"Wayland Town Library Record Book," 1850.
"Donations Book" 1878.
"Treasurer's Record Book," 1848.
"Wayland Town Library Scrapbook," 1878.

Wayland, Massachusetts. Wayland Town Records, November 1847-1853. Wayland Town Hall.